

# FEMALE EMANCIPATION AND PACIFISM IN LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE'S POETRY

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## Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	7
2. Biography.....	12
2.1 Female Emancipation.....	14
2.2 Religion.....	17
2.3 Pacifism.....	19
3. Poetry before the War.....	21
3.1 Major Themes: Georgian Poetry.....	22
3.1.1 Nature.....	24
3.1.2 Love.....	26
3.1.3 Mythology.....	28
3.2 Minor Themes: Political Message.....	29
3.1.1 Female Emancipation.....	30
3.1.2 Religion.....	35
3.1.3 Peace.....	38
3.3 Conclusion.....	41
4. Poetry during the First World War.....	41
4.1 The Pacifist Genre.....	42
4.2 Lady Margaret Sackville's <i>The Pageant of War</i> .....	47
4.2.1 Female Emancipation.....	48

4.2.2 Religion .....	53
4.2.3 Peace.....	57
4.3 Historical Framework: Female Emancipation during the First World War.....	66
5. Conclusion .....	70
6. Bibliography .....	73

## 1. Introduction

Who are these silent ones upon our track?

“We in our thousands, perished un beholden,

We are the women: pray you, look not back.”

(“Victory”, Lady Margaret Sackville, lines 10-12)

Up until the 1980s, when discussing or analysing First World War poetry, the academic literary world tended to focus on the male war experience as the only true war writing, especially the experience of fighting at the front - which was supposedly incommunicable to those who had not suffered the same fate. James Campbell famously defined this bias as an ideology of combat gnosticism: “the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience.” (203) This bias in the literary domain has had two main consequences: “[combat gnosticism has served] to limit severely the canon of texts that mainstream First World War criticism has seen as legitimate war writing and has simultaneously promoted war literature’s status as a discrete body of work with almost no relation to non-war writing.” (203) The result of this concerning women’s war poetry, as explained by Featherstone, is that since “the argument runs that war poetry emerges from direct experience of fighting and, because such experience was unavailable to women in the First World War ... there can be no women’s war poetry.” (95)

However, the twentieth and twenty-first century have been marked by an attempt to broaden the research of war poetry and re-evaluate women’s voices which had been neglected. Already in 1986, Nosheen Khan, in the introduction to *Women’s Poetry of the First World War*, echoes Campbell’s theory and explains the need for reorientation as follows:

This is a study of the response made by women in poetry to the First World War, a hitherto neglected part of the huge literature inspired by the war. The ignorance displayed towards women's literature of the First World War, in an age which lavishes wholesale attention even upon the most peripheral of material spawned by the war, is hard to understand unless it is seen as flowing from the atavistic feeling that war is man's province and one which has no room for woman. (1)

In addition to the bias of combat Gnosticism, Claire Buck, in her extensive research of women's war poetry, touches on another reason why it was suppressed:

“Despite women's extensive participation as war workers and as poets during both [World Wars], their national obligation to represent the domestic heart of the nation in Britain's management of the contradictions of its war policy ensures their marginalisation in and erasure from the historical record. This has been most marked in the arena of poetry.” (30).

Women were not to be seen as anything else but the representatives of the heart and home in Britain so their efforts, both in poetry and elsewhere, were neglected.

Jane Dawson and Alice Entwistle are also central voices in highlighting women's poetry from the twentieth century. In *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry*, they explain that “poetry by women extends the canons of war poetry which have been dominated by the English trench poets” (46) and they bring forward the highly political, diverse aspect of women's war poetry: poetry by women was not exclusively sentimental or jingoist, “the published [female] poets involved in war activity and social reform represent the common impulse of many women for human rights and political democracy; they display little English nationalism and some tackle the oppressions of British imperialism” (46).



This paper is meant to add to the growing attention to women's war poetry while also shedding light on the movement for female emancipation and its entanglement with pacifism at that time. As the quote by Lady Margaret Sackville at the beginning of this introduction suggests, women have always been beside men in the war, silently and in their thousands, but they were not noticed and they did not feel qualified to be noticed.

A poet capable of writing these words and making these observations is a poet worthy of further research. This paper will analyse the poetic oeuvre of Lady Margaret Sackville from 1900 to 1916. Sackville was an important feminist and pacifist who used her influential voice for these political causes before and during the First World War, which is why she deserves academic attention. I aim to present an analysis of both her poetry before the war, taken from different collections, and her only collection of war poems called *The Pageant of War* (1916), in order to gain a better understanding of Sackville's poetic oeuvre and the differences her poetry, and her political opinions, underwent during the chaos and turmoil of war.

By analysing and contrasting her poetry from before and during the war, I hope this paper can serve two purposes. Firstly, I aim for this paper to be a work of reference about an author that has been largely forgotten in British literary history. As Whitney Womack explains: "Although she was a popular and prolific writer during the first half of the twentieth century, Lady Margaret Sackville has been all but forgotten by contemporary literary critics" (6). This paper provides a detailed biography which focuses on Sackville's cause of female emancipation and the way her religious and pacifist views played into this cause. In addition to that, this paper contributes an in-depth analysis of her poetry at the start of her career, from 1900 to 1916, as well as a specific research into how her views on female emancipation, and the role of religion in it, change when her pacifist cause takes the upper hand during the First World War.

In her time, Sackville was truly an important English poet and an influential voice in the British cultural scene. Not many copies of her collections of poetry were printed, which has also played a part in her disappearance from literary studies today: “the major obstacle for readers interested in Lady Margaret Sackville is the inaccessibility of her texts. Her chapbooks were published by small presses in limited printings; for example, only 50 copies of *A Rhymed Sequence* and only 250 copies of *Quatrains and Other Poems* were published.” (Womack 239) Nonetheless, her poetry did appear in all the important periodicals such as the *English Review*, the *Nation* and the *Spectator*, and it was well received. Its main characteristics were a combination of Georgian and Romantic elements, heavily drawing inspiration from nature and mythology. This fit into the trend of women’s poetry of that time, which will be discussed more elaborately below.

Additionally, she edited collections of poetry and prose and she was very active in the English literary scene, especially in the promotion of other female artists. However, she was also engaged in sociocultural movements, most notably in the female rights’ movement that slowly gained popularity and support around the start of the twentieth century. The emancipation of women was one of Sackville’s main causes.

The second purpose of this paper revolves around the re-evaluation of Sackville’s war poetry. When the First World War broke out, every part of Sackville’s life was affected: from her social engagements to her poetry. The schism that the war caused in art, now seen as the starting point of modernism, is also very tangible in Sackville’s oeuvre: she moved away from the sweet, natural Georgian poetry towards harsh, realistic verse reporting and condemning the horrors of war. This reflects an evolution in the feminist movement during the war: it was severely divided by some choosing to support the war, hoping to gain a better social position to bargain for the women’s vote, while other chose to oppose it, insisting that it was women’s task to inform people of the folly of

this useless loss of lives. Sackville belonged to the latter half, and while her political motives, mainly of female emancipation, were never overtly present in her art before, she did use her poetry from 1916 to strive towards the political goal of peace. Sackville joined the pacifist movement and during the four years of war, she diverted all her efforts towards obtaining a peace treaty by writing poetry for the home front trying to convince the people of the inhumanity and recklessness of the conflict.

With this new political agenda, she seemed to forget her old one: feminism completely disappeared from her poetry and there was even a hostility towards the women who so willingly sent their sons and husbands to the battlefield. This was a radical change of views, since not all feminists who chose to oppose the war also chose to abandon their fight for equality, but Sackville is also not unique in this: the change ties into a significant trend in women's rights movement at that time, which will be analysed in this paper. I will look at the evolution of feminism during the First World War, especially the suffragist movement, to understand Sackville's (change of) position towards women and equal rights and to fit her into the overarching tradition of that turbulent time.

For this historical research into the women's movements at the time, I will base myself on the work by experts in women's history such as Susan Kingsley-Kent, Joan W. Scott and Susan R. Grayzel. They claim that pre-war feminism revolved around the idea of gender, both masculinity and femininity, as social constructs, which resulted in two separate and also socially constructed spheres for the two genders. The female sphere was one of domesticity, family and submission while the male sphere related to work, power and control. Those spheres had to be broken down in order to gain equality, such as the right to vote for women, according to the suffragettes. This happened partly during the war, as Leed explains: "Women ... experienced with the onset of war the collapse of those established, traditional distinctions between an 'economic' world of business and a private world of sentiment." (45). After the war, however, these ideals were suddenly perceived as

threatening: some post-war feminists ended up actually enforcing the separate spheres, pressuring women into the private sphere of the home, because the militant action and discourse of suffragettes that meant to overthrow the norm were now a danger to a country that had known nothing but war and violence for four years.

In short, I aim to analyse the seemingly radical shift in Sackville's poetry, both from Georgian poetry to modern poetry and from feminism to harsh criticism of women and pacifism, in order to form a complete picture of Sackville as a poet and to contribute to the re-evaluation of women's war poetry. Firstly, a full biography of Sackville will be provided as there is not a lot of information available about her, restoring her to her rightful place within the English literary scene of the early twentieth century. Secondly, I will look at her poetry from before the war as well as her engagements for female emancipation to understand Sackville's pre-war feminism. Lastly, I will analyse *The Pageant of War*, her collection of war poems both to draw critical attention to this forgotten body of work and to contrast Sackville's pacifism with her engagement for female emancipation. To fully understand the changes in her discourse on female emancipation, I will also provide an overview of feminism and suffragism for the pre- and post-war period based on research of women's history.

## 2. Biography

In this first chapter, an overview of the life of Margaret Sackville is presented. As not much is known about her today, it was a difficult yet crucial task to collect all available information in order to provide a reliable picture of her life and works. This chapter is divided into three main themes: feminism, religion, and pacifism. These are the three pillars that most defined her life, which becomes clear after an analysis of her writings as an editor of collections and as a contributor to periodicals. All this information is also instrumental in understanding both her pre-war poetry and the anthology of war poetry *The Pageant of War* that she published in 1916.

Lady Margaret Sackville was born on 24 December 1881 in London as the daughter of Reginald Sackville, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr, in “an ancient and privileged family” (Womack 6). Not much is known about her younger years and education except that she was most likely home-schooled in classical subjects, as was often the case for young women of aristocratic families. Arguably the most well-known member of the family today is Vita Sackville-West, Lady Margaret’s cousin whom she had little contact with. Sackville-West went on to become an influential poet and writer and formed a relationship with Virginia Woolf.

Lady Margaret Sackville took up writing poetry early on in her life, allegedly starting at just six years old when “she dictated a ‘long Dramatic Poem’ of which part was later published.” (Blain, Clements and Grundy 936). At sixteen, she came under the protection of poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, who is defined by Womack as a “poet, traveller, and antiimperialist who wrote passionately in favour of Egyptian, Indian, and Irish independence” (234) who, with his radical and controversial views, certainly helped to create a free political environment for Sackville.

She published her first book of poems *Floral Symphony* in 1900. Murdoch remarks that Sackville always opted to include “her formal title on the cover and the first page” (31) of her poetry collections, which “may make a class as well as a gender statement” (31). This means that, because of Sackville’s high social standing, she was a well-known figure in England and she was permitted her to pursue her literary aspirations. Furthermore, she decided against using a male pseudonym since the public would most likely already know her name and because it was a way to promote women’s poetry.

Besides writing poetry, she was also involved in the Poetry Society, an organisation where members could come together to discuss poetry. This organisation was first called the ‘Poetry

Recital Society', founded in 1909 and then went on to be called the 'Poetry Society' from 1912 onwards. Sackville was the first president of both organisations, which shows her strong involvement in the literary scene at that time.

From 1914 to 1918, Sackville was involved in the pacifist movement called the Union of Democratic Control as detailed below. After the war, Sackville spent a lot of time in Scotland and became the first president of PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists), an association for writers to promote worldwide interaction and co-operation. In 1936, she retired to Cheltenham where she lived until she died in 1963. She never married and had no children.

## 2.1 Female Emancipation

Sackville's engagement in the cultural scene in London went further than literary organisations as she frequently contributed to several feminist periodicals and edited collections of poetry and prose by female authors. The most notable collection is *A Book of Verse by Living Women* (1910) where she focuses on poetry that is written by contemporary female artists. This is a prime example of how Sackville's feminism was expressed: she took on the role of protector of female poets and writers and she tried to distribute and defend their art as best as she could, effectively trying to create the sense of a separate female tradition in literature. Up until that point, women did not have their own poetic tradition and were left to imitate the male tradition in order to be taken seriously: "women's impersonations of male lyrics appear to liberate them from the self-denying aesthetic of the nineteenth-century 'poetess' but to limit their stylistic freedom." (Dowson and Entwistle, 29) By analysing Sackville's introduction to *A Book of Verse* and that of a collection of Jane Austen's work, Sackville's position on women in the arts - and more generally, in the world - will become clear.

In her introduction to *A Book of Verse*, Sackville explains that the reason why poetry has lent itself to women in the past lies in the fact that writing poetry was associated with feminine qualities such as exploring and expressing one's emotions. Meanwhile, she also criticises the notion that in all other areas besides poetry, women were shunned or told not to participate:

Poetry is one of the few arts which popular prejudice has permitted women to exercise without opposition. The writing of verse appears to demand certain gifts which are superficially held to be peculiar to women. So poetesses have always been smiled on. Even in those far off days when it was thought part of the divine law, or anyhow more genteel, that women should be seen and not heard, the writing of poetry was not considered a disgrace." (*A Book of Verse* xiii)

This introduction both explains why a collection of contemporary poetry by women could be published, as women's poetry had always held some sort of esteem, but also what still needed to improve in order to properly evaluate poetry by women. Women had always been confined to their home, their private womanly sphere and so drew their inspiration from their house or surroundings. This, Sackville claims, is not where true poetry originates from – given that male poets never had to deal with these restrictions. For women's poetry to be truly equal to men's poetry, and for it to be evaluated as such, women needed to have the same freedom as men:

It is not from kitchen gardens or nursery gardens, or even from gardens closed round with yew hedges, however full they may be of beauty and perfume, that you may expect to hear the secrets of sea and forest uttered by the large voice of the wind. True, the yew hedges are not now very much impediment, but their influence is still apparent. When women have fully

proved their capacity for freedom, we can begin to estimate better their capacity for poetry.

*(A Book of Verse xiv)*

However, she notes that she has remarked the beginnings of this freedom. This seems like a logical consequence in a time when the feminist movement was on the rise and the belief became prevalent that gender is a socially constructed concept rather than a biologically determinable thing: “for the most part, feminists believed masculinity to be culturally, not biologically, constructed and attributed women’s victimization to a socialization process that encouraged the belief in the natural, biologically determined sex drive of men.” (Kent 233) This budding freedom greatly benefitted the position of women and, as a result, their poetry: “that, since the crumbling of so many false ideals and the infinitely truer attitude of human beings towards life and towards each other, women’s poetry of late years has reflected the change – has become a far firmer, more individual, more valuable thing - is, I think, undeniable.” *(A Book of Verse xiv)*

With this freedom, individuality, and value came a true revolution in form and content, which made women’s poetry a proper genre with its own characteristics: “certainly, every year brings proof that women’s verse is a growing thing – a tree which bears increasingly fruit which is of value to the world. Always it becomes less imitative – its grasp on reality more sure, less trivial, more certain in its achievement.” *(A Book of Verse xix)*

Sackville also remarks this revolution in women’s prose, more specifically in Jane Austen’s novels. She edited a reader with extracts from Austen’s most iconic works and in her introduction, she explains why Austen was a prime example when it comes to female artists making a name for themselves and establishing themselves as equal in genius to male artists:



[Jane Austen] was never a “literary woman.” The attitude of George Sand, for instance, towards art and life would have been utterly alien to her. She did not take her own or the opposite sex over seriously. She would certainly value character and moral integrity over brains, and the ordinary course of existence with its conventions and restrictions seemed good enough to her for all intelligent people. It is amusing to think what she would have said to Ibsen’s heroines! Yet she is a triumph for Feminism. She has produced on a small scale almost completely perfect work, and whilst charm and breeding and humour and good-humour are appreciated in the world she is never likely to be forgotten [sic]. (*Jane Austen* xiv)

Jane Austen’s world seems small, dealing with everyday life and trying to manoeuvre within the rules instead of breaking them. However, according to Sackville, Austen was still greatly successful at establishing her name as a female author in a time when this was unlikely, and more unlikely still, she is one of the most read authors today.

## 2.2 Religion

In addition to her engagements for female emancipation, religion was also a big part of Sackville’s life. She was a Roman Catholic and upheld her Catholic values throughout her life. It was, in fact, so important to her that she never agreed to marry Ramsay MacDonald, the former Prime Minister she had a relationship with for fifteen years, as he was a Presbyterian: “David Marquand ... has said he thought ‘the formal barriers’ that [MacDonald] wrote were keeping them ‘from marriage’ ... were the question of religion.” (Barkham)

In her contribution to the suffragette periodical *Jus Suffragii* (1906-1924), Sackville links her feminist conviction to her religious one. In the fragment below, published a little over a year

after the war broke out and a year before her war poems would come out, she talks about being an idealist in times of war. While many people seemed to be able to focus solely on the war and its immediate consequences, Sackville reminds her readers, who were almost exclusively female, to dare to look “a little way beyond” into the future and to remember the feminist battle that they had been fighting for a decade. Being an idealist and staying true to your values, Sackville claimed, helps to abolish evils and to get the future on your side. This is also what Christianity means for her, an idealistic dream one must hold on to and try to realise even when many others cannot imagine it ever happening.

Those who at a time of crisis dare to look even a little way beyond the immediate issue are at once stigmatised as cranks, idealists, Utopians, sentimentalists, and many worse things. I am consoled by thinking that the future is generally on the side of the cranks. Considering that our present degree of civilisation has only been reached by the struggles and sufferings of the sentimentalists and cranks in the past, these taunts do not greatly move me. To not one of the evils which these – the despised and rejected of the world – helped to abolish, would the most conservative among us willingly return. I also remember and take comfort in the thought that Christianity is based upon an idealism which, judging from their own declared opinions, must indeed appear foolish and impracticable to many Christians. These, it would appear, only accept Christianity because they believe that by no chance can it ever be put into practice. (“War: The Woman’s Point of View” 3)

Not only is this a sneer towards fake or supposed Christians who abandoned their religious values when it suits them but it is also directed at those who did not believe equal rights were feasible.

### 2.3 Pacifism

When the First World War broke out, Sackville joined the Union of Democratic Control. In fact, her whole family was involved in the pacifist movement, especially after Gilbert Sackville, her brother, died in action in 1915. The UDC was a British pressure group which was formed to “advocate democratic control of foreign policy, to formulate reasonable peace terms, and to establish direct contact with democratic parties and groups on the Continent.” (Hanak 1) Among the founders was Ramsay MacDonald, Sackville’s romantic partner. Although it was not an openly pacifist movement, it did oppose conscription and censorship along with other restrictions on civil liberties. It is also important to note that this organisation, which was relatively progressive, had links to the suffrage movement.

As mentioned before, Sackville’s war poems from 1916 are pacifist: they call for peace and denounce the atrocities of the war. Sackville also already argued vehemently for peace and against the sort of nationalism that brought on the war in her contributions to periodicals. On October 1, 1915, she explained that

Patriotism – that great word – has now to be cleansed from all manner of evil associations. But this can never be done without the help of women. A country’s greatness must cease to be judged by the standard of conquered territory; nor must it count its possessions acquired by force as an Indian the scalps hanging at his belt. The true meaning of patriotism is the honourable desire that one’s own country should attain to its fullest and finest possible development, with no sort of interference with the development of other countries. (“War: The Woman’s Point of View” 3)

Clearly, Sackville hinted at the role women had to play in pacifism. War is inherently a masculine thing and women would not need a man's protection if they would stop starting wars. Furthermore, men's interventions do not serve to protect all women alike but only their 'own':

It is sometimes urged that men fight for the protection of women and children; but that is hardly so, since were war, which is a man-made thing, abolished altogether, such protection would not be required at all. Moreover, this protection only applies to the women and children of the combatant's own race, not to the women and children of the enemy, who under the most merciful conditions of war imaginable must still be subjected, in an invaded country, to all manner of discomforts and privations. ("War: The Woman's Point of View"  
3)

Sackville concludes in these quotes that women needed to realise that war is unnecessary and the excuse of protection is obsolete. Instead of being blinded by the glamour and heroism that were deeply imbedded in the discourse about the war, women could – and had to – open their eyes and see the underlying system of violence, superiority, and arrogance.

[Women] must refuse to be dazzled any longer by the glitter and glamour, the shadow of romance which is one of the superficial trappings of war. They have never been backward in enduring necessary suffering; let them protest with all their souls against that which is unnecessary. Not against physical suffering alone let them protest ... but principally against the substitution of false for true values; against the arrogant claims of force, of all that estranges and dehumanises mankind. Let women stand forth openly on the side of the spirit, realising that all compromise in this matter is defeat. ("War: The Woman's Point of View"  
3)

She remained careful not to offend the ‘heroes’ of the war but merely suggested that their heroic efforts be put to better use:

“Let no one think that I seek to minimise the heroism which war brings forth; but women must regret that all this heroism, all this splendour of sacrifice and endurance, should be squandered on an end so essentially wasteful as war. They regret that these qualities cannot somehow be organised and used in the service of peace.” (“War: The Woman’s Point of View” 3)

From this analysis of Sackville’s contributions to periodicals and of her introductions to collections, it is undoubtedly clear that feminism, religion and pacifism are her core values and that these are intertwined. She unwaveringly believes in freedom and equality for women and this form of ‘idealism’ is not unlike Christianity for her. As free and equal humans, women have a big responsibility not only in stopping the war but also in recognising the patriarchal system that made the conflict possible in the first place.

### 3. Poetry before the War

As mentioned previously, Sackville’s poetry from 1900 to 1914 was conventional, and it will be analysed more closely in this chapter. After having classified her style of writing, poems from five out of her seven pre-war collections will be analysed according to the three most prevalent themes and images: nature, love and mythology. As Sackville was a conventional writer, these themes are recurrent in a lot of women’s poetry which will be shown by the included comparisons with contemporary female poets. Then, another characteristic of Sackville’s – and more generally: women’s – poetry is highlighted: its apolitical nature. By exploring Sackville’s three core values discussed above, feminism, religion and pacifism, as minor themes in her early poetry, it will

become evident how she managed to incorporate them implicitly without breaking with the apolitical trend of that time.

### 3.1 Major Themes: Georgian Poetry

Although the first decade of the twentieth century is often referred to as the Edwardian age, it would be more appropriate to place Sackville's poetry in the Georgian tradition following it. Sackville certainly already anticipated many of the characteristics that would become typical of the Georgian style of poetry and throughout her life, she stuck with that style of writing. Francis Berry, one of the contributors of *Harp Aeolian: Commentaries on the Works of Margaret Sackville* (1953) – the only academic work that has been dedicated solely to Sackville's oeuvre – defines her as “neo-Georgian”, upholding a dying mode and succeeding in it while others could not:

But there is still little neo-Georgian verse deserving respect ... Lady Margaret Sackville is another writer who has been unaffected by the main technical adjustments of this century but who vindicates her use of a dying mode – which is to say that in her writing the decay is checked – by a taste and integrity which is, unfortunately, shared by so few who write in this manner. (62)

The term ‘Georgian’ is based on the anthologies of Georgian poetry published by Harold Monro and Edward Marsh, who chose the name to honour king George V who ascended in 1910. Technically, only those poets who were included in the five anthologies can be called Georgian poets but today, the term is mostly used for a characteristic style of poetry. Sackville's name was not included in the anthologies, partly because female poets were only included in the last two volumes and partly because she lacked the necessary connections. Her cousin Vita Sackville-West did contribute seven poems to the last volume.

Georgian poetry as a style is characterised by the theme of nature and the English countryside, conventional forms and rhyme schemes and a “late Romantic character” (Encyclopaedia Britannica), or, as Dowson and Entwistle characterise it, “Georgian poetry was easily caricatured by the prevalence of sheep and countryboots in the wholesome English countryside” (15). Simon characterises it in less pejorative terms:

... we have the Georgians’ interest in nature, in the rhythm of the seasons, in love and birth and death, in the enigmas of personality, in the dependably certain and the dependably uncertain. The frequently remarked fondness of the Georgians for pastoral settings was a function of their brand of realism, not an expression of flight from reality. (132)

These characteristics are clearly present in Sackville’s poetry, as demonstrated below. The tradition of romantic poetry also impacted Sackville’s work as it also greatly focused on nature. However, the main Romantic element in her poetry is her interest in and focus on mythology: “by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, romanticism initiated a surge of enthusiasm for all things Greek, including mythology. In Britain, it was a great period for new translations of Greek tragedies and Homer’s works, and these in turn inspired contemporary poets.” (Su) The tales of Greek gods or Celtic customs are abundant in her poetry until, and even after, the war.

Although the anthologies of Georgian poetry did not prominently feature female poets, there were many women writers who, besides Sackville, fit into that tradition. By comparing five of the seven collections of poetry Sackville has written and published from 1901 to 1914 to poems by other female poets of her time, it will become clear that the Georgian school was omnipresent amongst women at that time and that Sackville was a representative of this larger tendency - while also being

unique in her adherence to and success in it in later years. For this cause, the collection *A Book of Verse by Living Women* will be used.

Although Sackville edited this collection herself, potentially choosing poets that closely reflected her tastes, it is generally seen as a representative of women's poetry of the time. Dowson and Entwistle, for instance, remark that "Lady Margaret Sackville's 'A Book of Verse by Living Women (1910)' (...) usefully documents writers and the mindset of literary women." of the early twentieth century (11), so this collection will be used as there are not many collections from those 10 years that have survived and even less that deal with contemporary female poets, and it provides a valuable and legitimate insight into the female poet of that time.

### 3.1.1 Nature

The most typical Georgian characteristic is a celebration of nature, and specifically that of England. It can sometimes be perceived as patriotic – one may think of the Georgian poet Rupert Brooke who described leaving a piece of England behind on foreign battlefields – but at other times, it is simply an appreciation of the small things in one's surroundings.

Sackville's poetry can hardly be called patriotic as it tends to be very universal and apolitical, but it surely contains a profound appreciation for nature. In "Lines" from *Lyrics*, for instance, the speaker has plucked blossoms from a secret, hidden garden only they know the way to. The path is

All carpeted with fallen leaves

It is, which are but memories,

Faint, fugitive and sweet,

Dropped silently from my soul's orchard trees,



Which I disturb with lingering slow feet. (lines 4-8)

The speaker draws a parallel here between the fallen leaves and memories: both are faint and fugitive. Sackville shows the reader that something deep inside the human, described here as the soul, is connected to nature.

Nature is also a prevalent theme in the poetry collection. Nearly all of Katharine Tynan's poetry deals with small natural scenes, which becomes apparent in titles such as "Lambs", "Larks" and "The Wind in the Trees". Similarly, "Autumn Morning at Cambridge" by Frances Cornford could be considered as the pinnacle of Georgian poetry: its content romanticises the English countryside around Cambridge, with the speaker picking an apple from the apple tree while noticing the bells and the lecturers going to their classes in town:

Down in the town off the bridges and the grass

They are sweeping up the leaves to let the people pass,

Sweeping up the old leaves, golden-reds and browns,

Whilst the men go to lecture with the wind in their gowns. (lines 5-8)

Cornford and Sackville have another element in common in their poetry, namely the lack of personal influences. The poet seems to have completely disappeared, or as Dowson and Entwistle put it: "Cornford studiously avoided the 'embarrassingly personal.'" (36). The reason for this, both in Cornford's and Sackville's work, is the fact that female writers often remained as impersonal as possible in order to be taken seriously and to avoid drawing attention to their gender.

Lastly, in "The Tramp", Rosalind Travers clearly also takes inspiration from Romanticism, in her description of nature. The speaker, a so-called tramp, has turned away from the city which is

“careless, glittering” (line 2) and now turns to Mother Earth, begging her to let her in: “Mother, O mother, let me in!” (line 6). This dislike of the city and preference for nature is heavily exploited in romantic poetry. At the end of the poem, the speaker reveals that she has come to the countryside to die, preferring to die under the stars than under the scrutiny of men. Her exclamations to be “let in” can then be taken literally as she wants to be buried in the earth.

### 3.1.2 Love

A second recurring theme in Georgian poetry by women is love or romance. Whether it is a strong love for nature, a love story from the myths or a tale of love between two people, the collection is full of love poems. The following two examples deal with unrequited or forbidden love, which seems a very human and personal topic, yet the speaker in the poems never gives an indication of gender and never dwells on the physical aspects of love.

In “Oh! My Dear!” from *Selected Poems* by Sackville, the speaker is nearly desperate for their lover to appear, even though they know it will never happen:

The wind has scattered the leaves down

And made a path so bright and clean

[...] For you!

No, my dear, no. –

And yet it might be so,

If dreams came true! (lines 1-8)

The speaker is unable to move or change the situation, they can only wish or dream. At the end, the desperation becomes so extreme that the speaker exclaims:

I wish you were dead and loving me and here,

With the broken earth for your bed!

My own dear –

And never a word to be said;

I wish that you were dead and lying very near

My heart a pillow for your head! (lines 31-36)

The second poem for discussion is written by Alice Meynell, perhaps one of the best-known poets of the collection. Her poem “Renouncement” has been studied and celebrated by many scholars and given that it fits in the theme of impossible love, it seems well suited here. In the poem, the speaker fights against their love for someone else – exhausting as it may be. However, when night comes and the speaker falls asleep, the following happens:

All my bonds I need must loose apart,

must doff my will as raiment laid away –

with the first dream that comes with the first sleep

I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart. (lines 11-14)

Only in their dreams can the speaker be free and think of what they want to think.

### 3.1.3 Mythology

Lastly, the late Romantic aspect of Sackville's poetry is evident in her references to mythology. Sackville has devoted many of her poems to the ancient Greek gods. The references to those intricate tales are everywhere, which points to a classical education: "her mastery of language, as well as her knowledge of Hellenic culture and Nordic and Celtic myth, indicate that she was well educated" (Womack 7). Dallas Kenmare, in *Harp Aeolian*, even goes so far as to say that Sackville is like a modern Greek poet: "in many of Lady Margaret's earlier poems the voice of the great woman-poet of Lesbos echoes, and again and again the strange impression recurs that the spirit of one of the priestesses of ancient Greece is speaking through a modern English poet." (40).

Two of her poetry collections bear the titles of her dramatic poems about the Greek gods: *A Hymn to Dionysus* and *Songs of Aphrodite*. In the latter collection, the reader is introduced to the myth of a nymph who was chased by Pan in "Syrinx". Desperate not to succumb to his efforts, Syrinx prayed to the gods to help her as

there shall none resist him – nay not one

On whom rest the eyes of his desire –

Wherefore am I too ruined and undone (lines 79-81)

Ultimately, the gods help her by turning her into reeds, which make a soothing sound when the wind blows through them. This myth explains the origin of the Pan Flute, but the poem never explicitly mentions Syrinx's fate or the instrument. It takes an educated reader to connect the dots. However, Sackville's poetry remains accessible in language and gives the tale a universal feeling.

Michael Field, which was the penname of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, equally explores the vast amounts of Greek myths in their poetry. In “Ariadne”, the speaker – whom the reader presumes to be Ariadne – comments on her love affair with Theseus. This story is relatively well-known and tells the legend of how the couple finds a way to defeat the Minotaur, but Field chooses to focus on the lesser known aftermath – similarly to Sackville who also draws inspiration from a more obscure myth. Theseus, now the king of Athens, has his eyes set on another woman, namely Antiope, an Amazonian warrior. Ariadne remarks that “there is no limit bars me; and no jealousy mars [sic]” (lines 16-17), meaning she is seemingly unbothered by Theseus’ abandonment as he faces the wrath of the Amazonian warriors in Attica.

### 3.2 Minor Themes: Political Message

By now, it has been established that Sackville’s poetry from before the war can be characterised as Georgian and additionally, that this is an indication of a wider trend at the time in women’s poetry. The most obvious discrepancy between what is known about Sackville and her Georgian poetry is the lack of her personal norms and values. While she was an adamant defender of peace and equality, her poetry seems to be dainty, almost divested of personality. However, upon further examination, it is possible to discern her core values of feminism, pacifism and religion in her early poems, albeit implicitly.

Sackville was not alone in this, as a lot of the poetry from the collection seems to be rather impersonal. It is actually a main point of critique by Kathleen O’Connor who reviewed the collection in 1913. She writes that “the work, as it has been submitted to our notice, of these ‘living women’ is, on the whole, slight and incidental in character. The authors write of flowers, of sunsets, of gardens ... subjects not at all unsuited to the poetic muse, but not apt to provoke very original or

profound results.” (163) However, this is a core characteristic of Georgian poetry in general: “In natural surroundings [Georgian poets] felt themselves less distracted by contemporary and historical fashions, and thus better able to grasp and penetrate those endlessly recurring experiences most central and urgent to our humanity.” (Simon 132)

While religion is still fairly present in the *A Book of Verse*, hardly any attention was paid to peace – which seems logical considering the First World War is still five years away - and the representation of women but when looking closely, a few examples can be found. In this next section, Sackville’s poems that seem more personal or political will be highlighted next to similar poems by other women from the collection. It is important to keep in mind that this is indeed a minority of the poems, an exception to the rule.

### 3.2.1 Female Emancipation

Although Sackville was a fervent fighter for equal rights, her poetry seems quite apolitical and impersonal when it comes to the representation of women while her journalistic contributions analysed above are quite the opposite. Dowson and Entwistle remark this trend in the poetry of plenty of female writers of that time: “intellectual women who developed alongside suffragism more often than not stifled any directly personal perspective in their poetry, especially in the first fifteen years of the century when the concept and activity of emancipation was at its most intense. Some were active in the cause of equal rights or expressed their opinions in correspondence in journalism” (9).

They later explain this fact by the lack of literary models for women to express political content in literature or poetry: “[women] had scanty literary models and limited opportunities to speak out on political matters. Their activities, journalism and personal records demonstrate the

extent of their drive for democratic causes, whether the suffragette movement, pacifism or social reforms” (43). Dowson and Entwistle point to alternative genres, such as journalistic contributions and personal records such as diaries or letters, as more suitable for channelling their political content - which is what Sackville did too.

However, they also remark that women’s poetry was not void of political or worldly matters but that these poems were often overlooked in favour of more personal, ‘feminine’ poems: “conservative critics entrenched the association of women with the personal life; a rhetoric of innate female patriotism, maternity and sentimental love undercut the goals of women’s suffrage. The myth that women eschew national or global topics is perpetuated by the excision of their political work from anthologies and other records” (44).

When looking at Sackville’s early poetry, there seems to be nothing remarkable about her portrayal of women. There is certainly no call for equality and the poetry seems to want to transcend the struggles of that time in favour of being timeless, classic and therefore neutral. Still, there are a few references to or indications of feminism in her poetry if one is willing to look very closely. For instance, Sackville devoted a lot of time to representing the female point of view in her poetry, which, according to Dowson and Entwistle, is a compromise between still having to adopt the male tradition while holding onto a distinctly female point of view: “the most successful negotiations between the influence of the male tradition and the distinctly female perspective tend to be the implicitly or explicitly women-centred poems” (29).

In “Iseult’s Song”, for instance, Sackville draws inspiration from the famous legend of Tristan and Iseult – which once again proves her knowledge of myths. However, the myth usually focuses on the journey that Tristan undertakes while this poem is written from the viewpoint of

Iseult. She is anxiously awaiting her lover in the dark, and when he arrives, she is overcome with passion. The descriptions are very much tied to her body and her experiences:

My eyes saw not, neither knew –

His sharp kisses pierced me through.

... The cold dews lay on my feet,

Only my heart so loudly beat,

There seemed no sound on earth save it! (lines 6-7 and 18-20)

The same goes for her “Ode to Aphrodite” in which Sackville focuses on the Greek goddess of beauty and love. The portrayal of her birth from the foaming sea inspires awe and the fierce descriptions make a real impression so that this feminine goddess of romance suddenly seems like a force to be reckoned with:

Not from calm waters only has she sprung,

Not only from the swing of somnolent tides,

But from grey depths by swart rocks overhung,

And icy caverns where whirlwind hides.

... And she is of the sea, yet not alone

Born of its sleep, and calm and amorous haze,

But of fierce waves whose wrath has overthrown

Vessels which wander down remote sea ways – (lines 1-4 and 11-14)



Lastly, her dramatic poem “Bertrud” follows princess Bertrud, who is married to king Brahen. The latter unfortunately falls in love with another woman, a court lady called Gerta. Together, Brahen and Gerta come up with a plan: Brahen falsely accuses his wife Bertrud of adultery and bribes a few men to testify against her so that the marriage is annulled and he can marry Gerta. Bertrud is convicted and banished, but Gerta, rather than rejoicing, is consumed by guilt. Then Gerta is on her deathbed and she begs Brahen to find Bertrud and bring her to court. Bertrud accepts this request on the promise of Brahen that he will give her everything she wants. Once arrived at the court, Bertrud asks for only one thing in exchange for her forgiveness: Brahen’s crown and kingdom. She expects Brahen to refuse and leave Gerta, as she believes all men are consumed by arrogance and greed, but Brahen and Gerta quickly agree that this is a small price to pay for their love. Bertrud is so moved by this portrayal of true love that she refuses to accept anything, forgives them both and urges them to forget her and start the rest of their lives together.

This story seems very traditional and invokes the feeling of an old legend, but at the heart of it is not king Brahen, his torment or anguish, but the two women, Bertrud and Gerta. Moreover, the poem explores themes of jealousy, competition between women and ultimately forgiveness. De Lingen analyses this dramatic poem in a similar way in *Harp Aeolian*: “*Bertrud* portrays two women – the perpetrator, and the victim, of a sin that appears beyond the reach of pardon. In the development *catharsis* comes to the sinner through confession, and the victim transcends herself and wins freedom of soul through generosity in forgiving” (10). De Lingen’s analysis also shows how this poem ties women’s emancipation to religion: it is the task of women to uphold Christian values, such as forgiveness, if they want to transcend themselves and “win freedom of the soul” – which could have a double meaning here.

These poems are not revolutionary, passionate calls for equality but rather a subtle shift in subject matter that is in line with Sackville's personal beliefs. As a last example, "The Apple" is interesting as it is one of her few comedic short poems. In it, she describes Eve eating the apple of wisdom in the Garden of Eden, causing her to be banished to Earth. In a very tongue-in-cheek way, Sackville implies that if Eve had known the true consequences of those bites, she would have kept the apple all to herself:

But had she seen with clearer eyes,

Or had the serpent been less wise,

She's scarce have shown such little wit

As to let Adam taste of it! (lines 4-8)

This playful poem is able to present a controversial message in an acceptable way: by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Eve takes the first step towards educating herself and opening her eyes to reality. By letting Adam taste it too, she ruins her chances of exploring her options alone and doing things her way. Instead of seeing it as the great original sin which set in motion the fall of mankind, Sackville portrays the act of eating the apple as something positive and even empowering. This confirms that Sackville's religion and feminism go hand in hand.

Dora Sigerson Shorter does not take inspiration from old tales of Greece or the Bible but takes a more contemporary and daring approach. In "A Vagrant Heart", the speaker who declares herself to be a woman laments not being allowed to go out at sea although this is what she is passionate about. Instead, she is restricted to staying at home. Instead of paraphrasing, a longer quote seems fitting as the poem manages to provide a very broad view of women's place in society:

Ochone! To be a woman, only sighing on the shore –  
 With a soul that finds passion for each long breaker's roar,  
 With a heart that beats as restless as all the winds that blow –  
 Thrust a cloth between her fingers, and tell her she must sew;  
 Must join in empty chatter, and calculate with straws –  
 For the weighing of our neighbour – for the sake of social laws.  
 Oh, chatter, chatter, chatter, when to speak is misery,  
 When silence lies around your heart – and night is on the sea.  
 So tired of little fashions that are root of all our strife,  
 Of all the petty passions that upset the calm of life.  
 The law of God upon the land shines steady for all time;  
 The laws confused that man has made, have reason not nor rhyme. (lines 13-24)

Although the language is still mostly metaphorical, this is the most direct criticism towards women's position in society out of all the poems included in the collection. Sackville's examples certainly do not match this poem in its political undertone as her poems are lighter and more uplifting.

### 3.2.2 Religion

While Sackville's religious beliefs were crucial to her real life, they did not lend themselves well to poetry because of her strong focus on Greek mythology. To mix the two subject matters would have

been strange as the Greeks had a polytheistic system whereas Christianity only recognises one true God. As a consequence, while the other female poets often refer to God, Sackville remains relatively quiet on that front. The only poem that mentions a single, unnamed god instead of one of the many Greek ones is “The God and the Worshipper” in the collection *A Hymn to Dionysus and Other Poems*. The dramatic poem lays out a conversation in which the God asks the Worshipper why the offerings and sacrifices for him have stopped. The Worshipper explains:

Behold, I have no wine

My vineyard is down-trodden; shall I get wine

Who am wholly desolate? But I have poured

My heart's blood forth instead of wine, and now

My heart is dry. (lines 12-16)

He is too poor and too stricken by bad fortune that he has nothing left to offer the God except for his true devotion. He trusts that “the strong mercy [of the god] ... will cover him and soothe and bring him peace.” (lines 36-37). The God is nonetheless disappointed and constantly asks for an explanation: “has thy heart forgotten, / Is then thy soul forgetful?” (line 2-3), “What sorrow hath sealed thy voice / That thou can'st sing no more?” (lines 16-17) and lastly “And wilt thou kneel not?” (line 21).

This poem could be interpreted as a critique on the old Greek beliefs, or any that are like it, where God/the gods are only appeased when offered riches and they are angered when a person has nothing of value to give. Moreover, it could be a promotion of Christianity as that belief system

revolves around your personal connection to god, prayer, and forgiveness which are ideals that seem far from the ones expressed in this poem.

As mentioned before, the other poets from *A Book of Verse* do draw inspiration from religion, as was very common at the time. Two brief examples will illustrate this point: “God Will Come Home” and “The Love of God”. Firstly, Anna Bunston’s “God Will Come Home” is a simple poem consisting of four lines with an ABCB rhyme scheme. The message is simple:

God will come home to his saints,  
 Come to them one by one,  
 As down to puddle, and pool, and blot  
 Comes home the infinite sun.

According to Kathleen O’Connor, reviewer for the *Irish Monthly*, “there is a striking sincerity in the verse of Anna Bunston, for example, which cannot fail to convince. Such poems as ‘A Root of Doubt’ and ‘God Will Come Home’ ring true, and they are all the more forcible because of their brevity.” (164) The simplicity of the message combined with the evocative imagery of the sun and the brevity of the poem made this a powerful ode to God in its day.

Michael Field, on the other hand, imagines what would happen if humanity were to lose God in “The Love of God”. The speaker claims that there is nothing on earth that humanity cannot lose, as we lose the spring to summer, the sun to the moon, even flowers, but humans shall never lose God. The thought alone makes the speaker “struck with sudden fear” (line 7), and they choose “all to forego, all to obliterate sooner than miss remembered joy of Thee” (lines 8-9). This poem clearly speaks of a deep love for God.

These examples show a much clearer and obvious connection to God in the Christian sense than Sackville's poetry. However, there is one poem by Sackville where she mentions God directly, namely "Weakness" from *Poems*. The poem revolves around an unnamed man who is made to represent the whole of humanity:

He was not strong enough to break away  
 From ignorant bonds which hinder men and blind;  
 To snap the prison-bars of yesterday,  
 Or curb the natural follies of mankind. (lines 1-4)

Even though the man is surrounded by nature and beauty and religion: "part of eternal Beauty – crowned with light – a thought of God" (lines 9-10), he fails to escape his prison and "his chains cling closer day by day." (line 20) This poem immediately stands out for its more critical tone. Although it still feels vague and universally applicable, the focus moves away from the past, the legends and nature towards a more current reflection on humanity.

It is clear Sackville feels that beauty, nature and God are what mankind ought to be focusing on for salvation. What not to focus on, she suggests, is "clashing chords of right and wrong" (line 16), "old thoughts and aspirations" (line 6) and "abortive hopes, and dreams confused and sere" (line 7). This hints at man's inexplicable need for conflict which Sackville condemns.

### 3.2.3 Peace

While there is no other poem of Sackville's as universal and reflective of human nature as "Weakness", there are two other poems inspired by mythology that are more direct in their condemnation of war and violence. In "The Helots", the speaker describes the fate of the group of

people to which the title refers. The helots are the people of Laconia and Messenia who were enslaved by the Spartans. They were forced to work on the land in order to sustain Sparta, and Sackville describes the horrors they underwent:

In peace and in peril  
 They feed on our lives,  
 When the war-lust is sterile,  
 With lashes, with knives  
 They goad us, and rich with our life blood the  
 land waxes fruitful and thrives. (lines 1-6)

Sackville chose this subject to draw attention to and judge slave labour and mistreatment of other people. Although the poem takes place in “Sparta, 500 B.C.”, the suffering and reasoning behind it seem to be timeless.

In “The Celts”, the viewpoint of the conqueror is highlighted. She describes the warmongering way of the Celtic people which is deeply rooted in their tradition and yet has no positive consequences for them:

So evermore we fought – and always fell;  
 Yet was there no man strong enough to quell  
 Our passionate, sad life of love and hate;  
 Ceaseless were we, and foes insatiate;  
 Though one should slay us, weaponless and dim

We bade our dreams ride forth and conquer him. (lines 43-48)

The violence seems to have no end in a “sad life” ruled by such humane things as love or hate. Even in their dreams, war and revenge dominate their every thought. Only in death by combat can they find peace in such a way of life: “So did we fall, vanquished and overcast / By the chill breath of windy dreams at last.” (lines 53-54). Instead of the expected imagery of honour, sacrifice and tradition, Sackville opts to show the hopelessness and endlessness of this kind of thinking.

Extending further than just the description of the violence of humankind, the poem “Parentage” by Alice Meynell explores how all those who choose to have children are just as responsible for subjecting them to the violence of mankind as those who go to fight. The poem is preceded by a quote claiming “When Augustus Caesar legislated against the unmarried citizens of Rome, he declared them to be, in some sort, slayers of the people.” The speaker in the poem contradicts this statement, claiming that

[...] those who slay

Are fathers. Theirs are armies. Death is theirs;

The death of innocence and despairs;

the dying of the golden and the grey.

The sentence, when these speak it, has no Nay.

And she who slays is she who bears, who bears. (lines 7-12)

In this poem, both the mothers and fathers carry responsibility for subjecting their children to a cruel world but the mother receives extra emphasis when “bears” is repeated. This could point to a double meaning, as the mother has to bear a child for nine months and bear the loss when the child dies.



### 3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that Sackville's poetry belongs to the Georgian tradition, and that this was a wider trend within women's poetry of that time. Her poems deal with the typical elements of nature, love and mythology which were designated as major themes. Most noteworthy, however, is the complete lack of her personal values and beliefs. There are a few poems that hint at her strong interest in religion, peace and feminism, analysed as minor themes, but these are the exception to the rule and overall, her poetry seems very detached. In the next chapter, these poems will be compared to her war poems from 1916.

### 4. Poetry during the First World War

As mentioned above, the poetry of Margaret Sackville significantly changed in tone and even style after the outbreak of the First World War. This is in itself not a surprising fact, as the war was the first conflict on such a large scale and with such horrifying events, like trench warfare and the use of gas, that it challenged everyone's imagination. According to Fox, at the outbreak, the "war was an invaluable source of artistic inspiration. This widespread belief not only persuaded artists to enlist [...] it also convinced cultural commentators that 'a true Renaissance of Art might be brought about under the stress of a noble and all-pervading emotion'" (3). He does go on to say that "[scholars today] continue to debate whether the conflict's effects were constructive, destructive, progressive or regressive in nature, and how broad and lasting those changes ultimately were. Most, however, have sided with the pessimists of 1914 and concluded that the war was ultimately detrimental to art" (5).

This revolution, rebirth, or death of the arts is what is now seen as the start of Modernism. Traditional conventions were questioned, the imagination was tested, and human nature was

examined and mistrusted. These modernist tendencies had an impact on everyone, even the most traditional artists such as the Georgian poets. So too was Sackville affected. In this chapter, her war collection *The Pageant of War* will be analysed and contrasted to her earlier poetry which was discussed above. Firstly, Sackville's poetry will be placed within the broader landscape of women's war poetry, specifically in the pacifist genre. Next, Sackville's war poetry is contrasted to her own poetry from 1900 to 1914, with a specific focus on her shift in political content: while her Georgian poetry was universal and unaffected by her personal beliefs, her war poetry is deeply personal and time- and location-specific. Furthermore, her core value of female emancipation, which was so evident from the contributions to periodicals, completely disappears in favour of the promotion of peace. Lastly, this shift in feminism in her war poetry will be linked to a broader historical movement as researched by scholars of women's history.

#### 4.1 The Pacifist Genre

As crucial as it was to place Sackville's earlier poetry in the genre of Georgian poetry, in order to further analyse its typical characteristics, it is also crucial now to assess to which genre Sackville's war poetry belongs. However, as explained in the introduction, the canon of poetry of the First World War has excluded female poets for a long time so there were no recognised genres within women's war poetry. Even when a poem by a female poet was included in a collection, women's war poetry did not have a very good name: "women's poetry of the First World War is often seen as bad writing, complicit with pro-war patriotism, celebrating male heroism as women mourned the soldiers' slaughter, and trapped in the forms, diction and values of late Victorian and Edwardian England" (Buck 31).

However, these stereotypes have been challenged in the last three decades. In a first step, the term ‘war poetry’ has been expanded, so it no longer excludes those who have not fought in the war:

Both elements of the genre classification of war poetry – the facts and the form – have been fiercely contested in the century following the end of the First World War. Must a poet have been to war before he (and I use the masculine pronoun deliberately) can be designated a *war poet*? Equally, how can the boundaries between poetry and verse be suitably maintained when thousands of soldiers and non-combatants alike turned their hand to verse to document their experience? Can anyone who writes about war in verse forms be a *war poet*? (Dawson 29)

Secondly, it is now agreed upon that the themes typically attributed to women’s poetry – patriotism, a celebration of masculine heroism, mourning – are not representative of the enormous body of work that female war poets left behind, as there is more to women’s response to the war as, for instance, Siegfried Sassoon’s “Glory of Women” suggests. In this chapter, I will briefly elaborate on the pacifist genre within war poetry before moving to the discussion of *The Pageant of War*.

Pacifist war poetry is the most popular and best remembered genre today, even though it is far from the only genre of poetry during the war, as Murdoch explains:

An additional restrictive element in the definition of war poetry is that it now most frequently means in fact anti-war poetry. Attitudes towards poetry of the First World War still favour a canon of accepted, combatant anti-war poets, with only the most sporadic interest in poetry by non-combatants of any kind writing during the war itself, some of which was, it is true, clearly (and sometimes crassly) pro-war.” (29-30)

Pacifist poetry was clearly only a small part of the huge production of poetry during the war.

Another important remark is that the pacifist contributions most remembered today are those written by men, considering that “the schism [that the war created] between creativity and politics was particularly acute for women, who were not expected to be politically informed nor to be poets.” (Dowson and Entwistle, 45) Think only of the impact made by critical, anti-war soldier poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and one begins to understand the legacy of men’s pacifist war poetry. However, if there is one category to place Sackville’s war poetry in, it is this one. Her call for peace and critical, almost defeated tone matches that of Sassoon and Owen easily, Murdoch remarks that “there is no overt patriotism at all” in Sackville’s war poetry. (37)

The pacifist genre is often associated with modernism as it explored new techniques such as irony and free verse. The reason for this is quite simple: the male soldier poet tried to oppose the war and the sense of patriotism and established order that brought it about, which was a highly controversial task, so he also chose to break away from tradition and convention in order to deliver his message. Buck lists this modernist, ironic character that is celebrated today as one of the reasons why women’s war poetry, especially in the pacifist genre, has been largely ignored: “women’s war poetry in the twentieth century is in fact fatally entangled with the emergence of the iconic figure of the soldier poet who protests the wholesale slaughter of the First World War trenches. This poetic figure of angry disillusion, father to Modernist irony, is far from a complete representation of the complex formation of First World War poetry.” (Buck 31)

While this modernist, pacifist writing might have seemed like an easy or evident choice for men, this was not the case for female writers. They scarcely had a poetic or literary tradition of their own, something Sackville tried hard to create in the collection *A Book of Verse*, so there was not much to break away from. This is why pacifist poetry, in the sense we remember it today, is quite hard to come by in women’s war poetry. Either women decided to deliver their message with a

'feminine', sentimental voice which appealed to people's feelings of loss and confusion, or they had to adapt the male or masculine forms and lose the sense of having their own tradition. Featherstone explains this as follows:

The canon of war poetry has been established on the premise of a development from a conventional poetic rhetoric to a radical revision of that language. Such a change did not happen in women's poetry of the war ... The apparent failure of women's poetry ... was largely a result of the lack of a distinctively female political or public discourse. For most women writers, there was no ready alternative to the adoption of doggerel or conventional poeticisms ... For living under the influence of 'the Man's House', women writers have only the language and experience of male culture with which to interpret its actions and effects. (97-98)

In the case of Sackville, it is not hard to read her war poetry as an attempt to match the critical male tone that had begun to rise in 1916. She seemingly abandons the feminine, Georgian tradition in order to be taken seriously in her message. She also seemingly abandons her goals of female emancipation for the more universal goal of peace – the goal that male poets worked towards as well.

However, it is important to note that Sackville's gender - as well as her class - might have helped the acceptance and diffusion of her pacifist poetry too. Since the message of peace was so controversial, especially in 1916, it was only because of her excellent social position and the fact that she was a woman, who were not taken too seriously to begin with, that she received no great criticism or was censured. Murdoch remarks this too: "Sackville's poems are, in aesthetic terms and in content ... acceptable to a modern reader, though whether this was the case in 1916 is more

questionable. It is likely that the extent of general pacifism (and more specifically direct objections to aspects of this particular war) expressed in them would not have been possible at all for a (less well-connected) male poet” (36-37).

“Flanders – 1915”, the first poem in Sackville’s collection *The Pageant of War*, is a good example for defining her stance on the war: she believed it to be a useless conflict that leaves behind disillusioned men who were told that war would bring heroism, masculinity and adulthood but instead it brought suffering. Womack remarks that “like most of her contemporaries, Sackville was horrified by the reports from the battlefield and deeply lamented the human cost of war.” (235) Sackville also expresses that she does not understand why these men would go back, which relates to Campbell’s concept of combat gnosticism explained in the introduction; only soldiers can understand what really happened in the war, “with eyes that understand”, and only they can explain why they would put themselves through it again.

The men go out to Flanders

As to a promised land;

The men come back to Flanders

With eyes that understand

They’ve drunk their fill of blood and wrath,

Of sleeplessness and pain;

Yet silently to Flanders

They hasten back again. (lines 1-8)

#### 4.2 Margaret Sackville's *The Pageant of War*

In chapter 2, it became clear that there is a discrepancy between Sackville's personal life, where she was very engaged in the women's movement and linked her core values of peace and religion to it, and Sackville's earlier poetry, which showed none of these causes and remained purely aesthetic. In this subsection, her early poetry and contributions to periodicals will be analysed side by side with her war poetry to discover and discuss the differences.

In general, one can say that Sackville's war poetry does the complete opposite of her early poetry: it is raw, highly political, it often breaks with traditional formal patterns and it is clearly rooted in the early war years. However, this political goal is not in line with her early beliefs as expressed in *Jus Suffragii*. While, in her younger years, she fought for equality and women's rights and used religion and pacifism to defend and explain this 'idealism', she now solely promoted pacifism as "Sackville's ardent pacifism shapes all her war writing." (Varty 47). While she used to believe that peace and religion were all tied to female emancipation, she now severed those ties and pointed at women as the guilty party in the upholding of war.

All these transitions will be analysed and explained below by exploring the theme of female emancipation in relation to religion and peace in her war poetry from *The Pageant of War*, as well as a comparison with other women's war poetry from that time, found in Catherine Reilly's anthology of women's poetry of the First World War *Scars Upon My Heart*. Furthermore, to provide a clear overview of the changes Sackville's poetry underwent, the analyses from chapter 2 are referenced.

#### 4.2.1 Female Emancipation

In her early poetry, Sackville did not concern herself with reframing women and advocating for equal rights. The only hints at female emancipation could be found in the prominent featuring of women and their experiences, albeit legendary or mythical women and not everyday women and their struggles. Sackville's suffragist engagement was proven not by looking at that poetry but looking at her contributions to periodicals, where she clearly expressed the need for equal rights and linked (the fight for) women's new role in society to religion and peace: women should uphold Christian morals and advocate against fighting of any kind.

In her war poetry from 1916, two years into the bloody and ghastly conflict, Sackville also did not concern herself with advocating for equal rights. In fact, instead of the silence regarding women in her earlier poetry, she was now openly hostile towards women and blamed them for the ongoing fighting. Instead of linking feminism to religion and peace, she blamed women for not achieving peace and betraying God. As Sackville formulated it herself in the periodical *The Coming Day*:

The war continues – a monstrous thing. So monstrous that nobody believes it. That is why it continues. Some crimes are incredible from their very enormity. It is only the small individual crime which can be grasped and prevented ... Women who would instinctively intervene in a fight between two men (without stopping to consider very closely the rights or wrongs of the quarrel) cheerfully stand aside when it is only millions who are pitted against each other. Though it appears an indisputably right thing for women to interfere to prevent private bloodshed yet the same action would be called treachery and madness if they strove to prevent the mutual destruction of opposing nations ... Our complacency must be



broken down. Especially the complacency of women – so terribly content with charities and committee meetings – so sure of the approval of God, proved that in the midst of unmeasured desolation they themselves have enough work to keep their minds contented. (49)

This shift in her political beliefs surrounding female emancipation will be highlighted below by looking at two poems where women are at the centre.

“Reconciliation” is, at first glance, a rather sentimental poem that talks of the unity women will feel after the war is over. Mothers, daughters, sisters and friends will recognise their grief and the loss of their loved ones in each other and this will bond them: “We who are bound by the same grief for ever, / When all our sons are dead may talk together.” (lines 9-10) This deep connection between all women is underlined in the last stanza:

With such low, tender words the heart may fashion,

Broken and few, of pity and compassion,

Knowing that we disturb at every tread

Our mutual dead. (lines 13-16)

However, this poem is not as innocent as it may seem. It is not a call for women to band together to achieve greater goals: the women portrayed in the poem are passive, grieving and unable to look beyond the ravages of war. Additionally, the speaker in the poem mentions what these women talk about when they meet each other: “Each asking pardon from the other one / For her dead son.” (line 11-12) It seems as though these women can only now recognise that they are at fault for sending their own sons, as well as these women’s, to their deaths and they have to ask for forgiveness for this folly and lack of sound judgement.

The subversion of Sackville's outlook on women is already subtly present in the aforementioned poem. There is nevertheless one poem that is much less subtle and truly criticises the role that women played in the war. This poem is the one Sackville is most known for today; "Nostra Culpa", which translated from Latin gives "Our Fault". According to Varty, this poem "is the manifesto poem on which the vision of 'The Pageant of War' is founded, and it provides the key to the merged aesthetic and political enterprise of the volume as a whole." (48)

The speaker in the poem is 'we', which gives the reader the sense that Sackville herself is speaking, and she is speaking for all women. The one thing that defines women in the poem is motherhood and the compassion and respect for the sanctity of life that it brings with it. Women, as mothers or mothers-to-be, should have stood up when life was threatened:

We knew, this thing at least we knew, - the worth

Of life: this was our secret learned at birth.

We knew that Force the world has deified,

How weak it is. We spoke not, so men died. (lines 1-4)

... That silent wisdom which was ours we kept

Deep-buried; thousands perished; still we slept. (lines 15-16)

Not only are women to blame for not standing up when life was endangered, they are also guilty of keeping silent when men took charge and declared a war, which goes against all the principles a woman has learned. This poem is "an attack [on women] on the account of their mute, passive acquiescence to a scheme of things, which they instinctively perceive as a monstrosity, and

yet will not speak out against fear of their veracity losing them the love and respect of men” (Khan 86).

Fearing that men should praise us less, we smiled

... We feared the scorn

Of men; men worshipped pride; so were they led,

We followed. Dare we now lament our dead?

... Because men laughed we were afraid (lines 6-14)

It even goes against the basic principles of religion: “Yea, this wrong / Unto our children, unto those unborn / We did, blaspheming God.” (lines 8-10). Varty sums it up as follows: “for Sackville, silence is neither passive nor permissive; it is an act of aggression, even against God.” (48) Although it may sometimes seem like Sackville is accusing the men of folly, the tone of the poem makes it so that men’s errors seem inevitable and it was up to the women to intervene.

In the end, the speaker asks the readers as well as the women she claims to represent what they shall plead – which brings to mind the scene of a courtroom where women have to stand trial for their passivity. The last line, which sums up the message of the whole poem, is perhaps the most powerful statement of the whole collection as women are represented as both the origin and the end of all life: “What shall we plead? That we were deaf and blind? / We mothers and we murderers of mankind” (lines 29-30).

Though other female poets expressed their dismay for women’s inaction during the war, none did so quite as intensely as Sackville. Many still acknowledged the grief that women went through and only blamed a small portion of women, often referred to as ‘jingoist women’, who

promoted the war and displayed an ignorant and dangerous kind of nationalism. “The Jingo-Woman” by Helen Hamilton is an excellent example of this. The speaker in the poem attacks the jingoist woman directly, telling her “How I dislike you” (line 2) and showing her why her actions, such as handing out white feathers to men who had not yet enlisted and judging them, are often foolish and misplaced. The speaker urges the jingoist woman to consider that there might be a good reason why these men are still at home, such as the fact that some men simply could not pass the army’s physical tests:

You *must* know surely

Men there are and young men too,

Physically not fit to serve,

Who look in the civilian garb

Quite stout and hearty.

And most of whom, I’ll wager

Have been rejected several times. (lines 23-29)

The jingoist woman is also accused of making women seem “such duffers” (line 19) and of taking advantage of an unfairly advantageous position, as women were not asked to enlist:

You shame us women.

Can’t you see it isn’t decent,

To flout and goad men into doing,

What is not asked of you? (lines 57-60)

In this poem, Hamilton is equally critical of women and she uses a clarity and directness similar to Sackville's, but the focus of the poem is not quite the same. While Sackville condemns all women and invokes motherhood, a characteristic so universally tied to women, Hamilton divides women into two parts: the jingoist women, who are criticised, and the women who know better and who are shamed by the actions of the former. Khan remarks that "[the poem] reveals Helen Hamilton engaged in scorning, in trenchant satirical tones, the dealer in white feathers ... Hamilton appears acutely conscious of the slur on women's intelligence created by their participation in such an activity" (81). Nonetheless, Sackville's harsh attitude towards all women in her war poetry can hardly be matched.

#### 4.2.2 Religion

Religion played a huge role in the portrayal of and motivation for the First World War. Men were encouraged to sign up and fight as if this was some divine purpose, as God was certainly on their side and not the enemy's. Khan analyses the role of religion as follows:

A nation going to war passionately believes in two things: the essential justice of its own cause, and that God is on the side of Right. At the popular level, the British illusion of being 'the agent of a divine power' was sustained through comparison of the conflict with a 'Holy War', which image, with its connotations of the Crusades, helped establish the maleficent Antichrist character of Germany and its Kaiser [sic]. (37)

This imagery of a holy duty and a just cause also pervaded the war poetry of that time.

Although religion, and specifically Christianity, was very important to Sackville, her early poetry did not feature it prominently, probably because it would clash with her choice of topic of Greek mythology. In her war poetry, she abandoned this source of inspiration and instead opted for

a lot of Christian themes, motifs and symbols that recur throughout *The Pageant of War*, which was common at the time. However, she does not link religion to women's emancipation; before the war, she called upon women to hold on to Christian morals and compared the idealism on which the Christian faith is based to the idealism that sustained suffragism. In 1916, this comparison is completely lost, as has already been proven in the analysis of "Nostra Culpa" which shows that Sackville felt women had betrayed God. She also did not share the popular view of the war as a cause supported by God. Instead, she became very critical of the clergy and searched for the true meaning of religion. This will be demonstrated by looking at three poems that deal with religion.

In "Refugees", Sackville brings the Lord's prayer to life. The speaker in the poem describes having to flee their home and becoming refugees, as the title suggests. At the end of each stanza, a line from the Lord's prayer is repeated and the content from the line reflects what has happened in the stanza. For instance, when the speaker is hungry and there is no food left to be found, they beg God: "The day we had no bread to eat, / We gathered up our things and ran. / ... *"Give us, O Lord, our daily bread"* (lines 1-6). By using the prayer in this way, almost ironically, the true meaning of it becomes clear again – which is easily forgotten if one mindlessly repeats the prayer every day without truly listening to its words. This signals a desire to return to the origin of the prayer, and of religion in general.

In the poem "Sacrament", the speaker would rather avoid going back to the true origins of the ritual of the sacrament. The 'we', who are later defined as "thy creatures", or "thy little children", address God directly and, while performing the sacrament, beseech him not to give them wine made of man's blood, and bread made of man's flesh like Christ did with his apostles. They want no more bloodshed and slaughter, there has been enough of that in the war and they beg God to make it stop, yet he does not listen:

This wine of awful sacrifice outpoured;

This bread of life – of human lives. The Press

Is overflowing – the Wine-Press of the Lord!

Yet doth he tread the foaming grapes no less. (lines 9-12)

This poem shows Sackville's wavering belief in God as she is incapable of understanding why, when so many men have died already, God does not intervene to put an end to the conflict.

The last poem to be analysed in relation to religion, "On the Pope's Manifesto", is most likely a reaction to the apostolic exhortation called "To the Peoples now at War and to their Rulers" written by Pope Benedict XV, who was elected in 1914 shortly after the outbreak of the war. In this exhortation from 28 July 1915, the Pope makes a passionate plea for peace: "this is the cry of peace which breaks forth from Our heart with added vehemence on this mournful day; and We invite all, whosoever are the friends of peace the world over, to give Us a helping hand in order to hasten the termination of the war, which for a long year has changed Europe into one vast battlefield" (Benedict XV).

Although Sackville and the Pope seem to have the same aims, she thinks his attempt is in vain:

One voice only though the reek and roar

Sounds with a simple and august appeal:

"Oh! Little ones of God, will ye not heal

These wounds, and cease from strife and hate no more?"

Vain words! Since violently as before

The nations heave (lines 1-6)

Sackville does not seem to believe that ceasing the fight in the name of religion is going to help, as many are fighting, or pretending to fight, in the name of religion while forgetting what Christ's message of love and forgiveness is all about. As long as every religious follower believe their cause is religiously just, peace is impossible. Since the form of this poem is a sonnet, the volta occurs just before the stanza in which this idea is expressed which helps to underline it even more:

And each secure *his* cause at least is good,

Sheds to approve that faith his brother's blood; -

Being by so much wiser than the Lord. (line 12-14)

Sackville was one of few poets who linked the theme of religion to the theme of female emancipation. However, she was certainly not alone in choosing religious motifs and themes in her war poetry. Many female poets opted for this, as they relied on their faith to get them through the dark times, while a few also adopted a critical tone like Sackville's. An example of the latter category is "The Dancers" by Edith Sitwell.

The speaker in the poem starts off on an ironic tone when they describe that God is good, since he "blows out the light for those who hourly die for us" (line 3) while they, the people at the home front, can still go dancing each night. This is both a criticism towards God, who allows so many soldiers to die each hour, and the dancers who seem to carelessly forget the war on the continent. This second criticism recurs in the other two stanzas: the dancers feed off of the dying breaths of soldiers to make their music swell as if they use loud music to distract them from the news of the battlefield, and then they keep on dancing even when God himself has died:



Though God die

Mad from the horror of the light –

The light is mad, too, flecked with blood, -

We dance, we dance, each night. (lines 12-15)

This poem tackles the “insensibility and indifference encountered on the Home Front “(Khan 103) as the dancers seem to be completely ignorant of the situation at the front, or they are not in a rush to stop the fighting. Although the poem does not mention peace openly, it does seem pacifist in nature as the speaker regrets the senseless loss of life and the dancers are “dull” and “blind” (line 11). Like Sackville’s religious poems, this poem condemns those who have forgotten the true nature of Christianity. People use religion as an excuse to justify their fight or to ignore the true nature of the war and in doing so, peace shall not be achieved.

#### 4.2.3 Peace

As is clear from the excerpts from the pacifist and suffragist periodicals that Sackville contributed to, she definitely saw peace as women’s obligation to be achieved. Since they understood the value of life and the recklessness of throwing it away in an armed conflict, they were tasked with reminding the men of these facts. However, what was first a passionate appeal to women’s maternal instincts and common sense turned into a bitter accusation in “Nostra Culpa”, where Sackville does no effort to unite women to fight for peace but rather puts them down and presents a situation where the evil has already been done.

In the rest of her poems where peace and pacifism feature as a prominent theme, there is equally no trace of responsibility that women can take up but rather a hopeless, defeated tone

condemning all those who do not believe in peace – men and women alike. This is perhaps most clear in “The Pageant of War” in which Sackville criticises the worshipping of War while ignoring its consequences. This poem is the title poem of the collection, and “used as a title without the addition of ‘and other poems’ ... means, too, that it is intended not just as the title of a single piece, but as a descriptor of the content of the whole collection” (Murdoch 38). Since the same has been said of “Nostra Culpa”, it can be concluded that these two poems are the most important ones to set the tone of the collection.

“The Pageant of War” is the longest poem in the book because of its ambitious scope: it means to take on the whole concept of war as a subject. The poem personifies War: “He was like Death sitting astride / a pale and neighing horse” (lines 36-37) and follows War as he holds a pageant through town to celebrate himself. At first, the atmosphere is positive and full of expectation as the speaker is excited:

From afar

I heard, and rushing down,

Beheld amazed

The pageant of triumphant War

Come trampling through town. (lines 1-5)

The weather matches this glorious occasion as it seems to be the most perfect spring day:

The sun was laughing through a golden haze

And all the city

Shone; it was the first of the Spring days.

But in the warm Spring light

The white road shone too white – too white

As though in some unnatural light. (lines 28-33)

These last lines, along with the description of the pageant “trampling” through town, alert the reader that something is not right about the parade.

This feeling is confirmed when the reader gets a first glimpse of War. He is described in terrifying terms: he “swayed from side to side”, his eyelids “were coarse and overhanging eyes glassy with pride” and he has a ‘blue-veined, swollen face’ (lines 38-44). He is so monstrous to look at that he even has to wear a mask to conceal his true nature:

He had to wear a mask, lest seeing

That obscene countenance too near,

The heart of every human being

Should shrink in loathing and in fear,

And turn upon this thing and slay it there. (lines 46-50)

This powerful metaphor makes clear that, should people be able to see the true nature of war, they would turn away from it instantly yet they are blinded by the glory and the ‘pageantry’ of it.

The reader then discovers who follows War in the parade: “the pitiful, bright army of the dead” (line 55). The victims of war are traipsing behind him, in their thousands, as they

Saw not, or saw too late,

The face of him

To whom so willingly they sacrificed

And who had come to them disguised

In the garb sometimes of Peace, sometimes of Christ. (lines 67-71)

These dead, which the reader assumes to be soldiers in the context of the First World War, did not see War's true, unmasked face in time and they were misguided by the excuse of fighting for peace or fighting for God. Here, Sackville's view on religion's role in war is again made evident: too many soldiers and men in command justified their cause by claiming it was a holy, divine purpose to defend their country while, according to Sackville, Christianity revolves around peace – in the spirit of 'loving thy neighbour' and 'turning the other cheek' - instead of war.

After the fallen soldiers, the parade consists of the women left behind who "each, lest her tears should mark her, / Wrapped her head close beneath her veil" (lines 75-76). Surprisingly little attention is paid to these women with no references to women's responsibility. They are simply shown hiding their face, which might be interpreted as a silent admittance of guilt. Next in the parade are those who profited from the war: the "High-priests of War, crafty and keen / With greedy hands and heavy-hanging chin" whose arms "clasped bursting money-bags" (lines 89-93). Sackville clearly puts the blame on those gaining monetary profit from the war as they intend to prolong the conflict.

The culmination of the poem comes when the speaker realises why the road, which they have commented on throughout the poem for its pristine whiteness, has that peculiar colour:

I looked again at the white stones;

I saw.

The dust was trampled bones.

‘Twas *they* that made the road so white.

There were bones of children, bones of men,

Trampled in since the world began,

Road of triumph – road of glory! –

This road conceived by men and then

Built from the ruins of man. (lines 129-137)

The road on which War walks is paved by the bones, the physical remains of all those sacrificed for his purpose. The speaker remarks that the road is both conceived by man and built on the ruins of man, indicating that war is both the idea (or alternatively, “man’s gift to man” in line 146) and the final ruination of mankind.

Finally, after a description of all those fallen and trampled to form the white dust on the road, the speaker concludes their description of the pageant by remarking that those watching the pageant will one day also turn to dust:

They are silent – let them so remain,

These very humble folk, these quiet slain,

And let the living smile –

Until they too shall suffer the same pain.

Whilst the long pageant stretches mile on mile –

As though these innocents had died in vain. (lines 171-176)

This second-to-last stanza shows the eternal cycle of war that mankind is stuck in, with the amounts of war casualties growing and the pageant becoming longer. While the poem never mentions a call for peace, it is very effective in negatively portraying war, both by its length, which allows the poem to be read like a story, and the vivid personification of War. It shows that the innocent soldiers died in vain and that War, glittering and impressive as it may be, is in reality a monstrous thing that leaves destruction and death in its wake.

In a more obviously pacifist poem, “The Peacemakers I”, the speaker represents all pacifists and uses the ‘we’-form to create a sense of unity, both within the pacifists and with the reader. The poem explains how the pacifists will keep resisting violence in their mission for peace:

We do not fight with swords,

Red iron, explosive fire,

And on no battle-field

Urge we our soul’s desire. – (lines 1-4)

Their aim is to educate those who perpetuate violence with thoughts, words, and the support of the “batteries of God” (line 12). They hope to plant a seed in the public’s brain so that, even if they do not understand the need for peace now, they might later. In the meantime, the pacifists understand and accept that they are vilified:

Not this year or the next

Shall we be justified;

Enough that we perplexed

Your minds before we died.

This shall suffice our need:

That one swift word once said

Shall later be your creed;

And other men lie dead. (lines 29-36)

What is most striking about this poem is that it becomes clear Sackville no longer explicitly calls the matter of peace a woman's responsibility. This is an idea she had expressed multiple times in contributions so, when reading the title, one might think women are meant by the 'peacemakers' but the poem gives no evidence of the gender of the pacifists. In fact, the language in the poem is so neutral that it seems to be applicable to any gender and any conflict. It seems she might have had the Union of Democratic Control in mind, or the pacifist movement in general, but the undertone that women specifically ought to be involved, is lost.

In "To One Who Denies the Possibility of Peace", the last pacifist poem to be discussed in this paper, the speaker attacks an "old friend" who, like the title suggests, does not believe peace to be a valid option. The poem combines a provocative, accusatory tone with the traditional form of the sonnet: 14 lines divided into two quatrains and two tercets. A sonnet usually adheres to a strict rhyming scheme but Sackville has taken some liberties, as was often the case in the twentieth century, making the poem's rhyme scheme ABBA ACCA DED FEF.

In the poem, the 'friend' is the newest in a long line of non-believers who realised only too late that they were wrong, like those who sentenced Socrates and Jesus Christ to death:

... You are still the same:

You poisoned Socrates, you crucified

Christ, you have persecuted, mocked, denied,

Rejected God and cursed Him – in God's name. (lines 1-4)

When peace comes, and it will inevitably come according to the speaker, this friend will realise they were on the wrong side of history and quickly change their story. First, they encouraged men to fight and to prolong the war, ignoring their pleas that the endless fighting was useless, and when these men eventually won the war and obtained peace at the highest cost, they reaped the benefits without giving it a second thought:

You gave monotonously to the flame

All those (whom now you honour) when the new

Truth stung their lips – for fear it might be true;

Then reaped where they had sown and felt no shame. (lines 5-8)

Sackville published this poem in 1916, when peace was not yet in sight and the war would continue for two long years, but she could already visualise peace, a "new splendour" that "quivers in the cold", and urges her friend, and all those they represent, to get on the right side of history this time:



You slandered Darwin, Florence Nightingale;

Now a new splendour quivers in the cold

Grey shadows overhead; *still* you are late. (lines 12-14)

It is hard to find such openly pacifist poems in the oeuvre of other female poets. While women could call for peace, they did not do so in such clear terms and with such telling titles. In order to contrast Sackville's theme of peace in war poetry, a poem written by S. Gertrude Ford will be discussed. Ford was a known feminist and pacifist so one would expect her poetry to contain similarities to Sackville's poems but Ford's approach is quite different.

In "A Fight to a Finish", Ford attacks those who she deems are responsible for prolonging the war. The speaker mentions "War-lords", "profiteers", "Jingo-kind" and "Armament-kings" who all support the war and cry out slogans like "War is good" and "Fight on." This gives the impression that the only ones who want to keep the war alive are those who profit from it, like those employed in the production of arms. On the opposite side, the speaker puts the people who suffer most from the war: "the dying", "the poor", "the wounded", and "the maimed and blind". All this is still in line with Sackville's views as war is portrayed as senseless violence that can have no good outcome.

There are, however, two differences with Sackville's poetry: firstly, there is no clear call for peace. While the poem condemns the war and tries to expose the true reasons behind the conflict, it does not urge the reader to join the pacifist cause. Secondly, the role of religion and women in connection to peace is completely different. While Sackville blames women for their inaction and for hiding behind religious excuses, Ford still believes in the power of women and the church:

‘Fight on!’ the Armament-kinds besought:

Nobody asked what the women thought.

‘On!’ echoed Hate where the fiends kept tryst:

Asked the church, even, what said Christ? (lines 7-10)

The speaker remarks that, had women been able to speak their mind, the war might have never happened. They also believe that the conflict goes against Christian values. While this poem is just one example of women’s pacifist poetry and cannot represent the whole genre, it does show how differently Sackville has approached the subject of peace.

#### 4.3 Historical Framework: Female Emancipation during the First World War

Now that Sackville’s personal quest for female emancipation in her poetry and her personal life has been explained, it is important to answer the question whether the radical shift caused by the war was something unique to Sackville or if it belongs in a tradition within feminist history. In order to do this, a historical framework of the first wave of feminism will be provided based on the research by historians who focused on feminist research concerning women and gender in wartime.

Until the war, the feminist movement had been growing quite rapidly. It was based on the increasingly popular belief that men and women lived in separate spheres, respectively that of work and dominance and that of the home and subordination. At the foundation of these spheres lied the presupposition that men and women and inherently, biologically different which made men’s domination a natural thing. Feminists wanted to abolish these spheres, and thereby also abolish the idea that men and women were biologically different. They introduced the idea that the defining

characteristics and behaviours of men and women were socially, rather than biologically, constructed. Kent explains this as follows:

Prewar British feminists regarded their movement as an attack on separate-sphere ideology and its constrictions of masculinity and femininity. They perceived relations between the sexes to be characterised by a state of war in which patriarchal laws, institutions, and attitudes rendered women vulnerable to sexual abuse and degradation, rather than by complementarity and cooperation, as separate-sphere ideologists so insistently claimed ... Their demand for the elimination of separate spheres incorporated an attack on the cultural construction of the female as 'the Sex' and of the male as the sexual aggressor [sic]. (233)

The ultimate goal of recognising gender as a social construct and eliminating the separate sphere ideology was to create true equality and to achieve positive consequences for both men and women by ridding them of restrictions: "challenging the dominant discourse on sexuality, [pre-war feminists] aimed finally to create a society in which the positive qualities associated with each sex could be assumed by the other, a society in which the 'natural' equality and freedom of both men and women could be achieved." (Kent, 233)

When the war broke out, change was bound to happen. With more and more men going off to the front every day, women were called upon to take up the men's jobs and keep the economy of the country from collapsing. In this, most feminists saw a great opportunity: if they worked hard and obtained the same results as men, the general public would have to admit that women could be equal to men: "During the war ... women were able to demonstrate their capabilities, their skills, and their power, and thus to challenge the irrational prejudices that otherwise or previously had confined them to a separate sphere. Indeed, women proved they could be like men" (Scott 2).

As mentioned before, some feminists opted to support the war “with pro-war suffragists like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst arguing that women’s contribution to the war effort could lead to the vote, as well as expand women’s roles through new forms of war work” (Buck 32), while other feminists vehemently opposed the war and saw pacifism as a woman’s natural duty. According to Grayzel, “in Britain, the question of whether to support the war or to participate in public anti-war conferences like that at The Hague divided both the militant and nonmilitant women’s suffrage movements [sic]” (162). This divide contributed, in part, to the downfall of the feminist movement after the war.

In 1918, it becomes clear that, for the most part, feminists succeeded in their goal. Women who were either householders or the wives of householders and who were over thirty years of age gained the right to vote. This is what a lot of feminists had been striving for, yet the conditions relating to age and economic status still limited the number of women that could vote and some questioned whether this was really a sign of admitting true equality, as men did not face these conditions. Kent remarks that, after the war, a lot of feminists were proud of the progress they had made but also suddenly afraid that, by returning to their militant actions from before the war, they would lose the goodwill they had amassed. This led to a “defensive posture of the feminist movement during and after the Great War [that] contrasted sharply with the confidence and assertiveness displayed in the prewar era [sic]” (Kent 236).

After the war, feminism never regained the velocity and power it had before. After four years of violence and unrest, it seemed unthinkable for feminists to return to their previous methods of raising awareness. In addition to that, the movement had suffered from a great schism caused by the choice between support of or protest against the war. Slowly but surely, the feminist cause was mostly abandoned and there was a return to pre-war conceptions of gender. According to Scott, war

is “the ultimate disorder, the disruption of all previously established relationships, or the outcome of earlier instability. War is represented as a sexual disorder; peace thus implies a return to ‘traditional’ gender relationships” (“Rewriting History” 27).

This idea, of a return to traditional conceptions of gender after the First World War, was not prevalent for a long time as military history recognised the women’s right to vote in 1918 as a success for feminists and a real step towards female emancipation. However, the contrary proved to be true:

Historians had to acknowledge that women’s war efforts did not cause a profound change of the hegemonic gender order or long-term improvements of the status of women, even though they might have been of great importance for the contemporaries themselves. Also, dichotomous and hierarchically constructed concepts of femininity and masculinity prevailed in the public sphere of the ‘home front’ and the theatres of war, where women faced being denounced and sexualised. These insights led historians to believe that the war did not, in fact, have any long-term implications on political gender transformations. On the contrary, its impact in this respect was ... deeply conservative. (Hämmerle, Überegger and Bader-Zaar, 3-4).

In short, the war proved to be the downfall of organised feminism and the return to conventional beliefs about gender. This historical framework can be applied to Sackville’s literary accomplishments: she was an ardent feminist before the war, which becomes clear from the periodicals that were analysed. During the war, she sided with the feminists promoting peace instead of those supporting the war efforts. Finally, in *The Pageant of War*, it is evident that Sackville has abandoned her cause of female emancipation in favour of adopting the masculine poetic tradition,

promoting peace and placing the blame on women. In this way, Sackville is an example of the larger evolution within the history of women's emancipation in the twentieth century.

## 5. Conclusion

As this research has proven, Lady Margaret Sackville is a wrongfully forgotten voice in British literary history. This paper provides an overview of the life and works of Sackville with a specific focus on the period between 1900 and 1916 and serves to bring out of oblivion a female poet who was very influential as an artist, feminist and pacifist.

Firstly, Sackville should be remembered for her feminism: before the war, she promoted female artists and attempted to be a patron of a female tradition in poetry. She intertwined her personal beliefs, as well as her religious conviction, into this purpose of female emancipation. Her political voice was loud and clear in her contributions to periodicals, but she decided to take a different approach in her art and became a master of apolitical, Georgian poetry throughout her life.

Secondly, Sackville should be remembered for her pacifist war poetry. Although it has taken a long time for women's war poetry to be noticed and analysed when the canon of war poetry was dominated by soldier poets, her harsh, critical tone and confronting imagery can easily compete with those of Sassoon and Owen. Her collection of war poetry *The Pageant of War* serves as a prime example of the pacifist genre in women's war poetry, a subject which has not yet received enough academic attention.

This paper focuses on the theme of female emancipation in Sackville's life and works and especially the way it interacts with her pacifism during the war. After a thorough analysis of her Georgian, apolitical poetry and her political contributions to periodicals, it becomes clear that female emancipation was Sackville's greatest cause before the war even though it is not present in her art.

She combined her desire for equality with religion and pacifism: it was women's responsibility to preserve peace and to always adhere to Christian morals. During the war, she abandoned her cause of female emancipation, as well as her attempts at creating a female tradition in poetry, in order to promote peace in her poems. Sackville portrays women as guilty, irresponsible and hiding behind their religious excuses for sending men off to the war while urging the reader to realise the folly of the conflict and to call for peace.

This seemingly sudden switch in values is linked to an evolution within British feminism researched by scholars specialised in women's history. The militant discourse of the suffragettes, who wanted to cause uproar and disruption, was suddenly seen as threatening to a country at war. The feminist movement itself was divided in two parts: the supporters of the war and the opposers. In the end, a lot of women abandoned the idea of abolishing the separate spheres that kept women at home and men at work in favour of remaining safe and protected against the ravages of men. After the war, the feminist movement never regained the velocity and power it had before. Sackville's war poetry can be seen as an artistic representation of this evolution: she abandons her quest for equality and a distinct female tradition within poetry and blames fellow women for their inaction during the war while conforming to the pacifist genre, which was dominantly male.

Sackville's Georgian poetry, pacifist war poetry, and the journey her fight for female emancipation has taken in both make her an interesting poet who should be remembered and discussed next to the more famous female of that time poets such as Alice Meynell, Rose Macaulay, and Jessie Pope. Hopefully, this paper has contributed to that cause.





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