

ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

‘It does not mak siccar you ken about weemin’:
The Fight to be Heard in the Poetry of Joan Ure

Author: Richie McCaffery

Volume 10, Issue 2

Pp: 56-69

2020

Published on: 1st Jan 2020

CC Attribution 4.0

1 4 9 5



ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

‘It does not mak siccar you ken aboot weemin’: The Fight to be Heard in the Poetry of Joan Ure

Richie McCaffery

Joy Hendry, editor of the Scottish literary magazine *Chapman*, has claimed that the question of the literary achievement of Scottish women in general represents ‘the double knot in the peeny’ which describes ‘the double disadvantage suffered ... in being firstly Scottish and secondly female.’¹ Joan Ure (1918–78), perhaps more well-known as a Glaswegian playwright, struggled to find the space and time to write but also had to fight in order to publish her work. While selections of her plays had appeared earlier, it proved more difficult to publish her poetry, which only appeared occasionally in journals such as *The Glasgow Review* and *The New Saltire* in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, towards the end of her life, she was forced, out of sheer financial exigency, reluctantly to seek funding for her art, yet her multiple applications appear to have been unsuccessful. As such, while she is a well-known Scottish playwright, her poems remain largely unexplored. Ure’s archives in the University of Glasgow library contain many hundreds of poems, only a tiny fraction of which were ever published, despite Ure’s best efforts.² This article exhumes her poems from obscurity, exploring the wealth of feminist sensibilities in her body of work, and aiming to solidify Ure’s position as one of the modern Scottish post-war poets that have influenced (perhaps indirectly) the position of Scottish women’s poetry today.

Given that Ure began to write in a post-War context, after a conflict that had offered women a glimpse of a change in roles with the displacement of men from the industry, it is tempting to suggest that Ure’s personal, social war was set against a backdrop of the ‘Poet’s Pub’ as depicted by Sandy Moffat and the entirely male ‘seven poets’ generation, comprising Hugh MacDiarmid,

¹ Joy Hendry, ‘Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing: The Nest of Singing Birds’ in Cairns Craig (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature, Volume 4: Twentieth Century* (Aberdeen, 1989), 291.

² Note: This essay was written before the publication, in 2018, of *The Tiny Talent: Selected Poems by Joan Ure* (Brae Editions, Orkney). This selection of poems, edited by Alistair Peebles and Richie McCaffery, is the first collection of Ure’s poetry to be published.

Edwin Morgan, Norman MacCaig, Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown, Sorley MacLean and Robert Garioch. The historically freighted Scottish phrase ‘mak siccar’, in the title above, was invoked by Ure to connect her poem to that of Robert the Bruce, Hamish Henderson’s *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (1948) and all the other occasions in poetry and history that have called for its use. It means ‘to make sure’ of something and is often used to show someone going as far as they can for a cause in which they believe. The phrase in this context implies that humankind has been through slavery, war and religious fanaticism, and the time has come to ‘mak siccar’ for women. This article sets out to capture a sense of how Ure had to fight to be heard and ultimately suffered for her art. In order to do this, it will look at and analyse a number of Ure’s poems, many of which were never published and are being discussed here for the first time in an academic context.

Poetry of the Second World War and the post-war period stood out for its calls for social reform; the drive for change; education; and regeneration. Every poet of writing age during the war engaged with its effects, impact, meaning and legacy in their work, no matter how marginally, latently, symbolically or briefly. However, unlike the male war poets such as Hamish Henderson and Ure’s friend Edwin Morgan, Ure’s work seeks to address and interrogate further obstacles and social hindrances experienced by the post-War woman poet and writer. Her work is therefore one of difference, when set against what Douglas Gifford, Alan MacGillivray and Sarah Dunnigan have called ‘the overwhelming maleness of the canon’ at the time.³ Dorothy Sheridan, writing about the experiences of women in World War Two generally, has stated that ordinary women had ambivalent views about the war. While most agreed that ‘Hitler had to be stopped’, they viewed the war as a time of both liberation from the traditional roles of maternity into employment, and a reluctant acceptance that this was an upheaval, not a conscious reform of society along more equitable lines.⁴ The complex, protracted and at times frustrating paths women poets had to take in order to be heard or to see their work published, highlights that something was profoundly amiss at the time. For instance Olive Fraser was only published after her death when her friend Helena Shire retrieved and reappraised her work.⁵ Ann Scott-Moncrieff’s work

³ Sarah Dunnigan, Douglas Gifford and Alan MacGillivray, ‘Opening the Doors: Fiction by Women 1911–47’, in idem (eds), *Scottish Literature in English and Scots* (Edinburgh, 2002), 541.

⁴ Dorothy Sheridan, ‘Ambivalent Memories: Women and the 1939–45 War in Britain’, *Oral History: Vol. 18, No. 1, Popular Memory* (1990), 39.

⁵ See: Helena M. Shire (ed.) *The Pure Account: Poems of Olive Fraser* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen

should belong in any discussion of Scottish war poetry, but her early death and the dearth of poetry as a result means that there is no clear trajectory of her creative life after the war.⁶

The semblance of change offered by war certainly powered the social and poetic work of Joan Ure and her writing in turn shows the ways in which women poets could break from the narrow aesthetic constraints and expectations of a gendered poetry of elegy, witness and outrage by creating a pro-active and challenging poetry of possibility aimed at freeing the voices of women and allowing them a say in the political make-up of post-war Scotland. Ure and her contemporaries, like the poet, artist and film-maker Margaret Tait, seized the onset of peace as an opportunity to reform the discourses of nationalism. They played an important role in the reconstruction of Scottish society, allowing for the rise of the ‘Scottish spring’ during the 1960s, a term used by cultural figures such as Edwin Morgan to describe the increasing liberalisation of Scottish culture and art.

Dorothy Porter refers to these ‘secret narratives of women’ as a ‘hidden female tradition ... reached by breaking through ... barriers.’⁷ This alerts us to the historical depth of redress that was required. Hamish Henderson argued that the degrees by which women’s voices have been audible throughout history have fluctuated and that in the nineteenth century ‘during the Clearances, women offered ... resistance’ and their voice held the status of ‘high prestige.’⁸ In contrast, during times of modern conflict, the voices of women poets have been overlooked, but this often neglected work contains resistance and a fight all of its own. Virginia Woolf argued for a separatist politics for women disinterested in militarism, embracing pacifism that would lead to a new type of ‘feminist self-determination.’⁹ It should also be noted that this argument first appeared in Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, published in 1938, on the very cusp of the outbreak of war. This new outlook for women had to find its own adequate register of the war experience and in the post-War world. This is perhaps why Hugh MacDiarmid castigated so powerfully the ‘doggerel verse and nineteenth-century lyricism’ of some women writing lachrymose elegies

University Press, 1981) and Helena M. Shire (ed.) *The Wrong Music: The Poems of Olive Fraser 1909–1977* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989).

⁶ See: ‘Feature on Ann Scott Moncrieff’ in Joy Hendry (ed.) *Chapman 47-8* (Spring 1987), pp. 83–114.

⁷ Dorothy Porter, ‘Scotland’s Songstresses’, *Cencreastus*, 25 (1987), 48.

⁸ Hamish Henderson, ‘The Women of the Glen: Some Thoughts on Highland History’ in idem, *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature* (Edinburgh, 1992), 252.

⁹ Simon Featherstone, *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader* (London, 1995), 100

for men lost on the battlefield.¹⁰ In contrast to what MacDiarmid claimed of other women poets, many of Ure's poems demand radical action and reform; they refuse to stay in a position of social stasis, and push for greater engagement by, and awareness of, women poets.

For women poets, the war permitted and indeed provoked both a departure from male poetic discourse, and a freeing of the female poetic perspective from the restrictions of simple elegy. The nemesis of Ure's writing is the figure of the brave Scottish soldier, who she reviles for being such a looming presence in the nation's consciousness and imagination. She blames him for her failure to be heard. As we will see with Joan Ure, the protesting elements of her work are motivated by a desire to close the gulf between the writing of men and women while demonstrating originality in its own terms. Her dramatic work and, for example, the filmic experimentation and work of Margaret Tait, in addition to their poetry, heralded the efflorescence in the arts in the 1960s and 1970s in Scotland, as well as foreshadowing the rising number of women poets such as Liz Lochhead, Kathleen Jamie, Jackie Kay, Angela McSeveney, Carol Ann Duffy, Meg Bateman, Elizabeth Burns and Sheena Blackhall who rose to prominence in the 1970s through to the 1990s. While Ure stands alone in her literary achievements, she was committed, like a number of her poetic contemporaries, both men and women, to write themselves into a regenerated, less patriarchal, national post-war tradition.

Joan Ure was the pseudonym of Glasgow-born playwright and poet Elizabeth Clark. Very seldom mentioned now, Ure's name only appears in discussions of post-War drama, owing to her sole substantive, and posthumous, book publication *Five Short Plays* (1978). Alasdair Gray and Robert Trotter, in their respective accounts of the life of Joan Ure, give us a sense of the difficulty she went through before, during and after the war. For Gray, 'Betty was born into a culture which gave her good food, good clothing and a well-furnished home in return for self-suppression.'¹¹ Also for Gray, her imagination and identity as a writer provided the only escape from drudgery and neurosis. Immediately after the end of the war Ure's sister committed suicide. Her mother was struck down by tuberculosis when Ure was twelve, forcing her to assume the role of housewife and surrogate mother for her younger siblings. In later life she ploughed 'a lonely furrow' in 1950s Scotland as a playwright and poet,

¹⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹¹ Alasdair Gray, 'Of Joan Ure: Playwright' in idem, *Of Me and Others* (Glasgow, 2014), 145.

giving rise to many of the poems discussed here. Her creative and professional lives (she worked as a clerk) were marred by eating disorders, depression and associated ill-health, culminating in her death from respiratory failure, brought on by asthma, in 1978.

Ure claimed forcefully on numerous occasions that she did not write poetry, but if she did it would be like ‘your ruins – what and who caused it should be like skin and hair – guessable yet ambiguous/anonymous ... it should be, if you like ... a failure – not intentionally, but because of the world.’¹² This remark comes towards the end of Ure’s life, at a time of frustration at the lack of recognition, but it shows a form of near self-censorship through the prediction of societal neglect (or the neglect of ‘the world’). Publication has evaded Ure and she has been made to feel as if her work does not have a legitimate place in the existing literary climate. It narrates both Ure’s willingness to dramatize her struggle to be heard and her frustration at being a female poet and playwright writing at an unreceptive time. As she writes to Edwin Morgan, she was ‘willing to become a beggar for freedom’ and for the sake of her identity as a creative writer, poet, essayist and playwright.¹³ Ure had a very conflicted relationship with Scotland, wavering between individual national pride in remarks such as ‘I would not, if I could, exchange it for another’¹⁴ and scorn, as in her denunciation of Scotland as a ‘blasting, cold and philistine land’ devoted to intellect and masculine virtues and where ‘imagination is the suspect step-bairn’.¹⁵ Ure believed ‘in ideas, but not one is worth the sacrifice of the life of one single human being’.¹⁶ Her work almost amounts to a prolonged and articulated self-sacrifice ‘in the wilderness’ of women’s writing.

Then again, with a poem entitled ‘Another Attempted Suicide’ she envisaged her poetry as ‘soliloquies like arrows’, which suggests something about her urge to fight for a cause even while she acknowledges that change is still far off. Ure revelled in the underlying irony of her work and worried that many would not understand her. Ure’s significance in relation to the war is vital because she so utterly disavowed all war, fighting and sacrifice of life

¹² Joan Ure (Betty Clark), Letter to Edwin Morgan (1964), The Edwin Morgan Archives, Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

¹³ Joan Ure (Betty Clark), Letter to Edwin Morgan (1970), The Edwin Morgan Archives, Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

¹⁴ Joan Ure (Betty Clark), Letters to Christopher Small and Edwin Morgan (c.1960s / 1970s), Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

¹⁵ Ure to Christopher Small: c.1960s

¹⁶ Ure to Christopher Small: c.1960s

as symbolised by the representation of the aforementioned ‘Scottish soldier.’ Yet her work is marked by its tenacious resistance, its refusal to give, and its resilience in the face of material setbacks and the indifference of a hegemonic status quo. It could be argued that Ure is an important war poet because much of what she writes about has to do with her experience of silence during the war, when her husband ‘was posted overseas and for five years she lived alone in Glasgow bringing up her young daughter.’¹⁷ Ure acts as both a post-war custodian and reformer of ideals fought for in World War Two, arguing that as a central given to those ideals, women must be listened to and appreciated. Her on-going chronicles articulate an understanding of the nature of her own conspicuous ‘failure’ in a man’s world. Her work is marked by both its polemical nature and its belief that change must be possible, at the cost of self-harm, clinical depression or even one’s own life.

In ‘Headline!’ and ‘Another Attempted Suicide’ we get a sense of Ure’s polemics, her ironic sensibility and acute awareness of the position of women, but we are also given a modicum of hope, and if that hope is denied, the denial prompts a public act of protest, assertion and determination, rather than simple private self-sacrifice. For instance, in ‘Headline!’ Ure broadcasts a story many perhaps wished had gone unmentioned:

In the beginning
of this hopeful day
a woman is building
for herself a cage
placed on the through
road of the city that
fronts the theatre.
She wears for warmth
a sedate sandwich board
that soberly states
ALL I ASK IS FREEDOM
TO BE HEARD.¹⁸

¹⁷ Gray, ‘Of Joan Ure: Playwright’, 147.

¹⁸ Joan Ure (Betty Clark), ‘Headline!’ (unpublished manuscript poem), in *Letters to Edwin Morgan* (1966), The Edwin Morgan Archive, Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

Even in the nadir of despair, the thwarted woman writer is brought back from the brink by an angry and dogged belief that she cannot accept that this is the only option left to her. ‘Sedate’ and ‘soberly’ stand in contrast to the capital letters and the sentiment they express. The poem ends on a high, on a climax. It is as feminist a statement as Woolf’s request for a ‘room of one’s own’.

In ‘Another Attempted Suicide’, two characters dramatise the conflicted dialogue in her mind:

Next time she’ll make it unless:
 I choke on her resentment
 I stutter on her melancholic withdrawal
 I witness for her chronic disappointment
 I grieve that she’s finished with it all
 I know that it’s not inevitable
 I believe it could be changed
 I see there’s no mirror for her reflection
 and that’s why she’s deranged.¹⁹

Again, here there is a definite expression of resentment and rebellion, giving utterance to the sentiment that women require solidarity with one another, and that a coordinated battle with oppression is the only hope for their self-articulation.

Likewise, in ‘The Tiny Talent’, Ure adopted the patronising hypocoristic words used by men to describe the achievements of women:

There was this woman and she had this tiny talent.
 I call it talent for things must have a name.
 She had this talent that it happened to be death
 to hide. She knew this empirically because, having,
 the first time tried to hide it, she
 broke out in a rash.

¹⁹ Joan Ure (Betty Clark), ‘Another Attempted Suicide’ (unpublished manuscript poem), in *Letters to Edwin Morgan* (1973), The Edwin Morgan Archive, Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

But she was Scots and difficult to convince.²⁰

Ure's speaker reaches the conclusion that her talent is real and undeniable and to continue hiding it will result in untold harm. She may be hiding her talent because of her upbringing or class, but this is more likely a comment on a patriarchal Scottish society's readiness to dismiss women of talent and literary ability. Ure's speaker admits as much, and seems to call for a break in history, as 'she was Scots and difficult to convince', thus referencing stubbornness and modesty. Yet the awkwardness of the poet's expression here suggests both a loss of inspiration, and a frustrated attempt to spell out the issues:

This is a story that only seems sad at the end
but it is not sad because it is not a story but a
parable. It is good to know what they meant
when they talked of the talent, however small,
and it is death to hide it, however late you
find it out, it is always good to know what it was
they meant, those few who're describing things that
can't be proved, but can be acted out
again and again.

Ure also wrote a series of bitterly ironic essay-cum-dramatic-monologues which vividly capture a sense of gender inequality. For instance, in a 1962 issue of *New Saltire* she provocatively offers advice to young mothers: 'if you've any little girls with both intelligence and imagination, send them to the under-privileged countries to fulfil themselves in good works, for they should never be encouraged to explore their imagination.'²¹ Ure was dedicated to attacking the entrenched sexism of her society, in her plays, stories, monologues and poetry, thus leading the way in shaking post-war Scotland out of its inter-war attitudes and values. Likewise, she discusses in 'Scotland the Brave and Me' the nature of the male monopoly of bravery, with an emphasis on the 'Scottish soldier' in whose world 'there is no valid place ... for women.'²² The particular

²⁰ Joan Ure, 'The Tiny Talent' in Joy Hendry (ed.), *Chapman 27/28: Woven by Women* (1980), 48.

²¹ Joan Ure, 'Three Pieces' in Magnus Magnusson (ed.), *Saltire Review*, 6 (Edinburgh, 1962), 33.

²² Joan Ure, 'Scotland the Brave and Me: The Scottish Soldier Myth: An Essay in Fiction'

nature of her battle for equality in Scotland draws a picture of a small nation struggling with its identity, while it also reveals the lived experience of women on a much larger scale, beyond the limits of a Scottish reality.

In many of Ure's poems there is a startling blend of irony and genuine love for people and the way things could be. The following poem is a statement of Ure's craft, and it is worth noting her use of spitfire imagery:

My year for being resentful is over
 I only have to twist my arm
 to prove it myself.
 I have to believe that there isn't
 in Scotland a reactionary trend
 that only a spitfire could penetrate.
 I try to tell myself that
 there are people who see my material
 as a sort of balance, not a threat.
 Surely the Scottish soldier, the Scottish
 policeman, the Scottish Jack Tar
 is not all there is in Scotland,
 for if it is, we haven't got
 very far.
 But it's not my year for being resentful
 it's my year for loving everyone again.²³

And so, there is more to Ure's poetry than polemical protest. She wrote movingly symbolic poems about the position of women in society. 'Margaret on a Monday' introduces us to the title character, a widow, an independent older woman returning from the shops and walking up a steep hill. The speaker of the poem observes Margaret from the window:

An older man, moving slowly himself,
 stopped so as to have the privilege

in Robert Garioch, Edwin Morgan and Robert Tait (eds), *Scottish International*, 3 (1968), 32-3.

²³ Joan Ure (Betty Clark), 'My year for being resentful is over' (unpublished manuscript poem), in Betty Clark Archives (c.1970s), Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

of walking beside you.
He knew enough already to see
that he had a lot to learn from you.
I looked up again for the seagulls.

Man flies higher than any bird
and in spite of the force of gravity
I would not have known, precisely,
what brought me to the front of the house
if I had not happened to see you
going up the hill
as if it was easy.²⁴

This suggests that Margaret is, perhaps, a widow who has adapted to life alone. The man here is not portrayed as a competitor or predator, but someone who wishes to learn from experience and is keen to be viewed as an equal, or friend. Writing about Joan Ure, Alasdair Gray argues that ‘she was a woman’s liberationist . . . but liked men too much to want the two main sexes divorced.’²⁵ ‘Margaret on a Monday’ is a moving example of Ure’s search for balance and complementarity in her poetry, and it shows how change is possible.

Perhaps Ure’s most confrontational and ambitious poem is ‘Answer on the Side Drum in 1963 to the Blast of the Trumpet in 1557, with less than respect.’ In four parts, it addresses the polemical outpourings of Protestant reformer John Knox against ‘the monstrous regiment of women’, based on his objection to the authority of women *tout court*. The doctrinaire political misogyny of Knox is also dealt with by Liz Lochhead in her play *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), but Ure’s poem long pre-dates this. Ure grapples with the dichotomous legacy of Knox. He brought the Bible to the people, a school to every parish, and was the scourge of a corrupt Catholic church. Yet he also endorsed entrenched hostility in Scotland to women rising above whatever position they had been allotted by men. Ure makes use, in a

²⁴ Joan Ure (Betty Clark), ‘Margaret on a Monday’ (unpublished manuscript poem), in Betty Clark Archives (c.1970s), Special Collections, The University of Glasgow Library [01/2014].

²⁵ Alasdair Gray, ‘Joan Ure: 1919-1978’ in Joy Hendry (ed.), *Chapman 27/28: Woven by Women* (1980), 46.

feminist context, of a famous historical Scottish phrase, one dating back to the time of Robert the Bruce and also used, notably, in a male military context, by Hamish Henderson in the 'Interlude' poem of *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (1948). Here is Ure's use of the phrase:

He was nineteen months in the galleys
 It guarantees you wont like rowing
 It does not mak siccar you ken about women
 but you do ken about slavery.

...

I owe that man my education
 I can't help whiles being glad of it
 I know he meant the books for the boys
 but now they have got to me.²⁶

Ure here holds Knox up as both a radical reformer and a segregationist and misogynist. She shows how his attitudes have seeped down through the centuries in ways that are both harmful and indirectly beneficial to writers such as Ure. In the twentieth century, widespread literacy brought about by a democratic ideal of education sprung its own revenge on the doctrinaire authoritarianism and repressive patriarchy that insisted upon it in the sixteenth century. Ure's poem is a riposte to Knox's broadside from a time of increased awareness of women's rights. Knox himself becomes the subject of scorn in Ure's poem, not the 'monstrous regiment of women' who were attacked in Knox's treatise:

The truth is, once you open as a question
 the authority, for a start, of the weemin –
 although thon weemin were bonny queens
 they could burn you then like a tree –
 you get the hale notion of equality started!

²⁶ Ure, 'Answer on the Side Drum'.

...

He can't blast me doon noo wi his blethers
I ken fine he's no God for me.
But it's no just his mistakes that hiv scarred us
- except as we continue to make them,
we'd be better finding oor ain mistakes,
if mistakes there must always be.²⁷

The tables have turned on Knox, and women now have voices of their own. The Scottish Reformer is presented as a tub-thumping bigot like many others preaching in the streets, treated by Ure with less than respect. Yet her age will not make the mistake of wishing he never existed. Instead, it will treat him and his objectionable opinions with the right to be heard:

No, if Knox lived among us in the Sixties
he'd be worth his vote, his meat and potatoes
with the rest of us, for he earned it.
We could grant *him* our equality.²⁸

In this light we can see that even Ure's most polemical work is balancing protest and reconciliation.

While the poetry discussed here questions the status quo and calls for change, it is not mere protest and confrontation. Rather, it articulates new strategies and ways forward that are deeply informed by past experience. Feminism, through the experience of war, is beginning to find new ways to enter into and change the discourse of Scottish society from the 1950s onwards.

Dorothy McMillan argues that earlier in the twentieth century women poets in Scotland were 'prominent'.²⁹ But the process of the Scottish Literary Renaissance, a largely 'male-generated and male fixated' phenomenon like many intellectual treatments of literature, initially overlooked the work of women until the Scottish Spring of the 1960s. Many poets played a part

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Dorothy McMillan, 'Introduction' in *ibid.*, xix.

and started to place greater value on the poetry of women.³⁰ To say that all Scottish women poets of the twentieth century were part of a 'smooth story of sisterhood and continuity' is hugely simplistic and risks 'papering over the cracks, the ideological or aesthetic fissures between women writers'.³¹ That said, by the end of World War Two and the beginning of the second wave of the Scottish Literary Renaissance, many poets began to influence and change the poetic climate of the country, helping in many ways to ready the land for a revolution in the 1960s and 1970s in 'Scottish women's poetry, the fruits of which we are still enjoying'.³² This article has shown how Joan Ure the poet (as well as the dramatist) was an inherent if neglected part of this. She was both victim of prejudice against women poets in Scotland and polemicist against women's oppression in a rapidly changing community. Previously, the neglect of Scottish women writers moved suffragettes and poets like Helen Cruickshank to connect their social and poetic lives to support each other to try and achieve 'professional autonomy'.³³ Joan Ure was, in contrast, a lonely figure who could have and should have taken centre stage in an autonomous solidarity.

Germaine Greer, in *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (1995), argues that twentieth-century poetry is for women full of 'terrible precedents' where creative women not only destroyed themselves 'but are valued for poetry that documents that process'.³⁴ While Joan Ure dramatises being pushed to the limits in her work, she is all along dedicated to post-war re-construction over destruction of the self. The priorities and provenance of poetry by women and men have reached a new context in the twenty-first century; all the more reason now to see how much struggle was involved to make that happen. Considering the work of Joan Ure, we can begin to see it as part of the re-writing of social norms which helps revise and rejuvenate the discourse of creative, public and private identity in post-War Scotland. War offered women writers like Joan Ure the semblance of social change and, as a result, in their post-war work they had to push to challenge and change their society. In the words of Joan Ure, she had to fight for 'freedom to be heard' and while her remarkable poetry remains more or less unknown, she

³⁰ Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, 'Introduction' in *ibid.*, xix.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

³² McMillan, 'Twentieth-Century Poetry I', 438.

³³ *Ibid.*, 428.

³⁴ Germaine Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London, 1995), 390.

helped to pave the way for the rise in prominence of Scottish women poets who followed her.