

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

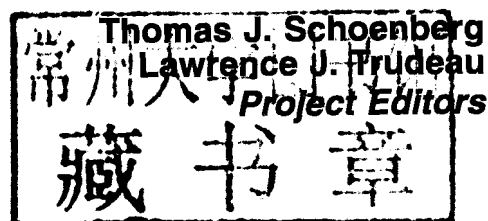
TCLC

228

Volume 228

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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19th-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.

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27500 Drake Rd.
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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN-13: 978-1-4144-3869-6

ISBN-10: 1-4144-3869-9

ISSN 0276-8178

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own."

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism, (CLC)* which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

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A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

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Vera Brittain

1893-1970

(Full name Vera Mary Brittain) English autobiographer, novelist, poet, journalist, and nonfiction writer.

The following entry provides an overview of Brittain's life and works. For additional information on her career, see *CLC*, Volume 23.

INTRODUCTION

Brittain is regarded as an important and influential feminist and pacifist of the early twentieth century. Although a successful journalist and public speaker, who wrote poetry and several novels during her lifetime, she is best known for her memoir *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (1933), which depicts her experiences as a young woman in England during World War I. In this work, as well as her novels *The Dark Tide* (1923), *Not Without Honour* (1924), and *Honourable Estate* (1936), Brittain examined such issues as education, marriage, war, and politics from a feminist perspective. She especially emphasized what she perceived as a woman's need to pursue independence and self-fulfillment through meaningful work. As her literary career progressed Brittain became increasingly concerned with pacifist causes, and pacifism became a predominant theme in her writings. Although Brittain never achieved the sustained popularity of some of her contemporaries, her work has experienced a renewed critical interest in recent years, particularly from feminist scholars sympathetic to her major themes of self-definition and personal freedom. As Muriel Mellown has observed, "It has been the common fate of feminists in the past to be first ridiculed, then ignored, and finally consigned to total obscurity. Outstanding among those whose work has in recent years been at least partially rescued from oblivion is Vera Brittain." Mellown asserts that "in many ways Vera Brittain represented the informed, liberal thinker of her day, and her work reflects the major intellectual trends which developed in England in the first half of the twentieth century."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Brittain was born December 29, 1893, in Newcastle, a town in Staffordshire, England. Her father, Thomas Arthur Brittain, was a successful businessman and a

partner in a paper manufacturing company, while her mother, Edith Bervon, was the daughter of a Welsh organist and choirmaster. Brittain developed a particularly close relationship with her younger brother, Edward. She spent her childhood years in Macclesfield and later in Buxton, a health resort in the Peak District of Derbyshire. As a girl she was educated at St. Monica's, a boarding school for girls, which was run by her mother's sister, Florence Bervon. Brittain was particularly influenced by a teacher named Louise Heath-Jones, who emphasized a commitment to social issues and current affairs, and who fostered the author's interest in feminism, especially the suffragist movement. Heath-Jones also introduced Brittain to the writings of Olive Schreiner, a South African feminist author.

Shortly before the beginning of World War I Brittain became engaged to Roland Leighton, one of Edward's friends from school. During this time she also decided to pursue a college education and persuaded her parents to allow her to prepare for the necessary entrance examinations. In the summer of 1914 she was notified that she had been awarded a scholarship to study English literature at Somerville College, a woman's college in Oxford. But shortly before Brittain was to attend classes World War I began, and both Edward and Leighton, as well as two of Edward's other close friends, volunteered as officers. Within a year Brittain left Oxford to serve as a Volunteer Aid Detachment (V.A.D.) nurse in Malta. In 1915 Leighton was killed in the war. Two years later Edward's other friends also died, and just months before the war ended Edward was killed in battle. Brittain recorded her war experiences and private loss in a diary, which was posthumously published under the title *Chronicle of Youth: The War Diary 1913-1917* in 1981. She also published a collection of lyric poetry in 1918, titled *Verses of V.A.D.*

Brittain returned to Oxford after the war and elected to study modern history, rather than English literature as she initially planned. During this time she met Winifred Holtby, a fellow undergraduate at Somerville, with whom she remained close for many years. After graduating in 1921 Brittain and Holtby lived in an apartment together in London and worked to establish separate careers in journalism. In addition to their literary ambitions, the women shared political and feminist ideals, as well as a commitment to world peace. During this time

Brittain and Holtby published articles in various periodicals, including the feminist journal *Time and Tide*, and completed their first novels.

Brittain's first work of fiction, *The Dark Tide*, was based on her college years. It was favorably reviewed but sparked controversy in Somerville and Oxford, which the author had portrayed in an unflattering manner. The novel also drew the attention of George Catlin, a political scientist, who contacted Brittain and pursued a romantic relationship with her. Brittain and Catlin were married in 1925. The author's second novel, *Not Without Honour*, was published in 1924. Soon after marrying, Catlin and Brittain moved to the United States after Catlin was offered an assistant professorship at Cornell University. Brittain, however, believed that living away from England jeopardized her writing career, and she moved back to London in 1926 while maintaining what she described as a "semi-detached marriage" to Catlin. Brittain and Holtby were reunited, and over the next ten years the two shared a home in Chelsea, to which Catlin visited during his vacations.

Brittain established a successful journalism career during this period but longed to produce an acclaimed novel. She attempted to fictionalize her diary from World War I but later decided to publish it as a war memoir, which she titled *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*. It was a best-seller, and Brittain became internationally known. Following her success the author made public appearances at home and abroad but continued to work on her next novel. In 1935 Brittain's father and Holtby both died. While managing her own personal loss, Brittain also struggled with the demands of serving as Holtby's literary executor. She continued to work on her own writing, however, and published another novel, *Honourable Estate*, in 1936.

During this time Brittain became increasingly disturbed by the threat of a second world war, and she began writing articles, attending rallies, and making speeches to promote her pacifist ideals. In support of this cause she also wrote and distributed a discussion newsletter, titled *Letter to Peace Lovers*, portions of which were collected and published as *War-Time Letters to Peace Lovers* in 1940 and *Testament of a Peace Lover: Letters from Vera Brittain* in 1988. During the 1940s Brittain wrote two more novels, *Account Rendered* (1944) and *Born 1925: A Novel of Youth* (1948), both of which sold well in England and received favorable critical reviews. The novels were not as successful as Brittain hoped, however, and during the last years of her life she turned her attention to writing another autobiography, *Testament of Experience: An Autobiographical Story of the Years 1925-1950* (1957), as well as several historical works. Brittain died on March 29, 1970.

MAJOR WORKS

Brittain's autobiography, *Testament of Youth*, is the author's best-known and most acclaimed literary achievement. Many critics consider the work groundbreaking in its depiction of World War I from a female perspective. Additionally, the experiences chronicled in the memoir address themes that Brittain would return to throughout her literary career. In the book Brittain relates the struggles she overcame, particularly with her parents, to pursue a college education and details her relationship with her fiancé, Roland Leighton. She also discusses her own experiences as a volunteer nurse in England, Malta, and France during World War I and recounts the pain she experienced on learning that her brother, Edward, as well as Roland and their friends, had all died in battle. *Testament of Youth* also includes Brittain's years at Oxford following the war and her career after graduation, ending with her impending marriage to George Catlin in 1925. In addition to her quest for independence and identity, Brittain examines her grief and personal loss on losing close friends of her generation, and she discusses the isolation that she experienced after the war, in a chapter titled "Survivors Not Wanted." The author's complex feelings of love, loss, and guilt regarding Roland, after she had agreed to marry Catlin, provide another important thread in the work. Critic Elizabeth Foxwell has declared that *Testament of Youth* "remains the best-known book of a woman's World War I experience, heartbreaking in its account of love, wrenching loss, and ultimate renewal from the ashes."

As in much of her fiction, Brittain employed events, characters, and themes from her own personal experiences in her first novel, *The Dark Tide*, which draws from the author's years as an undergraduate and explores such issues as education and marriage from a feminist perspective. Set in a women's college in Oxford, the novel relates the story of two women, Virginia Dennison and Daphne Lethbridge, representing Brittain and Holtby, respectively, who return to college after World War I and struggle to seek independence and self-fulfillment despite the conventional restrictions placed on women in the early 1920s. At one point in the story Dennison, who is the more confident and intellectual of the two women, refuses the marriage proposal of Raymond Sylvester, a young don at the college reminiscent of one of Brittain's history tutors at Somerville. After his first rejection Sylvester proposes to Lethbridge, who accepts. The marriage is a failure, however, because Sylvester seeks complete domination over his wife. At the end of the novel Brittain introduces the theme of self-sacrifice, illustrated by Lethbridge's decision to raise her deformed son on her own.

Brittain drew more directly from her life for her second novel, *Not Without Honour*, incorporating passages of her own diary in the work, as well as specific characters

and incidents. The protagonist, Christine Merivale, is a thinly veiled portrait of Brittain herself. Despite her progressive views regarding religion and marriage, Merivale is expected to live at home until she finds a husband, rather than pursue her independence and a college education. Merivale's parents and neighbors in her provincial home town, much like Brittain's own home town of Buxton, are scandalized when she becomes friends with a married curate, Albert Clark. Merivale becomes increasingly infatuated with Clark, who engages in socialist activities and holds unorthodox views. Clark is ultimately killed in war, while Merivale discovers personal freedom in Oxford.

Often described as Brittain's most ambitious novel, *Honourable Estate* combines details, including people and events, from both the author's and her husband, Catlin's, family histories. Once again Brittain examines feminist themes in the work, particularly the negative effects of male domination within a marriage and the gratification associated with political activism and female friendship. Originally intended as two distinct novels, *Honourable Estate* traces the story of two families, the Rutherstons, representing the Catlins, and the Alleyndenes, corresponding to the Brittains, and offers a critique of the Victorian concept of the ideal marriage. The contrasting family histories are brought together in the novel when Denis Rutherston and Ruth Alleyndene meet, become friends, and eventually marry. Denis's father, Thomas, is a domineering clergyman, while his mother, Janet, is a suffragette who eventually escapes her miserable marriage and finds fulfillment in political work and friendship with a playwright named Gertrude Ellison Campbell. Ruth's parents, Stephen and Jessie, are also engaged in a troubled marriage, in which Jessie is expected to adhere to the prescribed roles of dutiful wife and mother. In contrast, however, Denis and Ruth Rutherston have a more modern relationship, built upon gender equality. Pacifism and feminism are connected in the novel, as indicated in a speech that Ruth gives when campaigning for a parliamentary position, in which she urges women to support the abolition of war.

In Brittain's final two novels, *Account Rendered* and *Born 1925: A Novel of Youth*, pacifism is the predominant theme, while feminist and social issues play a secondary role. The psychological effects of war are of primary concern in *Account Rendered*, which is based on actual events surrounding a murder trial, to which Brittain was summoned as a potential witness. Although Ruth Alleyndene appears in the novel, the main character is Francis Halkin, a paper manufacturer, who is charged with the murder of his wife and attempted suicide. Halkin cannot remember the events surrounding his wife's death, however, and his amnesia is eventually shown to be the result of shell-shock, which he experienced during World War I. Halkin is ultimately declared

guilty but insane. Following a brief stay in an asylum, he rebuilds his life, remarries, and leaves England to work as an ambulance driver in North Africa.

The protagonist of *Born 1925*, Robert Carbury, was based on Dick Sheppard, the founder of the Peace Pledge Union, who befriended Brittain and influenced her pacifist ideology. In the novel Carbury is a priest dedicated to the promotion and preservation of peace, who experiences conflict in his private life with his wife, Sylvia, an actress, and his son, Adrian. In addition to the devastation of war, Brittain also emphasizes the importance of equality between genders and reiterates the idea that women need fulfilling work to have stable and healthy lives.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

During the 1920s and early 1930s Brittain attained moderate success as a journalist and attracted a number of favorable critical reviews for her first novels, *The Dark Tide* and *Not Without Honour*. With the publication of *Testament of Youth* in 1933, however, the author's literary reputation was firmly established. Brittain's autobiography quickly became a best-seller, and the author, elevated to the level of international celebrity, was in great demand for public appearances and lecture tours. Subsequent novels, including *Honourable Estate* and *Account Rendered*, were successful and well received but failed to garner the level of praise that *Testament of Youth* had inspired. Disappointed by the limited success of her fiction, Brittain focused her attention on other genres during the 1950s and 1960s, including autobiography, essays, and social history.

For some scholars this period represents a decline in the author's literary career, which had reached its peak in the years between the two world wars. Brittain's strong pacifist views during World War II also damaged her reputation, especially in England, which had experienced the destruction of London as a result of Hitler's bombing of the city during 1940 and 1941. It wasn't until after her death in 1970 that Brittain received renewed interest from critics. In the late 1970s *Testament of Youth* was once again brought to public attention when it was adapted for British television and reissued in paperback. Interest in Brittain's life and work also grew with the 1995 publication of a biography written by Mark Bostridge and Paul Berry, Brittain's friend and literary executor.

In recent years commentators have expanded their study of Brittain beyond her landmark autobiography, focusing especially on her novels, such as *Honourable Estate*, and her diary writings. Some, including Muriel Mellow and Lynne Layton, have discerned in these works the author's first explorations of feminist and

pacifist themes that would achieve fuller treatment in her later autobiographical and historical writings. Mellown has argued that Brittain conceived of her fictional works "as further weapons in her campaign for women," and that in them, "she wrote to analyze the existing conditions of society and to indicate the directions which future progress should take." *Testament of Youth*, however, remains Brittain's most widely praised and studied work. Jean E. Kennard has described the autobiography as "a powerful attack on the false values of nationalism and militarism and their roots in patriarchy." Elizabeth Foxwell has noted the groundbreaking aspects of the work, including its unique perspective and accessible linguistic style, and asserted that the author "used autobiography as a powerful tool for both political and personal expression."

While Brittain has often been dismissed for employing conventional narrative modes and ignoring the experimental literary trends of her era, she remains an important and influential figure of the early twentieth century for many feminist scholars, many of whom cite her dedication to social issues, her insightful observations on war and personal loss, and her quest for self-fulfillment as her key contributions to modern literature. As Mellown has declared, the value of Brittain's writings "springs from the honesty and clear-sightedness with which she probed the moral problems underlying contemporary events. . . . [A] true intellectual herself, she saw reason and intellect as the means by which human beings can transcend suffering and evil, put an end to injustice and oppression, and begin to establish a better order of life. Socialism, feminism, and pacifism were in her view all ways by which human society can advance from its primitive state to enlightenment. For her a recognition of women's rights was not the least significant indication of the development of the human spirit towards full civilization."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Verses of V.A.D.* (poetry) 1918
The Dark Tide (novel) 1923
Not Without Honour (novel) 1924
Women's Work in Modern England (nonfiction) 1928
Halcyon; or, The Future of Monogamy (nonfiction) 1929
Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925 (autobiography) 1933
Poems of the War and After (poetry) 1934
Honourable Estate (novel) 1936
Testament of Friendship: The Story of Winifred Holtby (autobiography) 1940
War-Time Letters to Peace Lovers (letters) 1940

- England's Hour: An Autobiography 1939-1941* (nonfiction) 1941
Humiliation with Honour (nonfiction) 1942
Account Rendered (novel) 1944
Seed of Chaos: What Mass Bombing Really Means (nonfiction) 1944
On Becoming a Writer (essay) 1947; also published as *On Being an Author*, 1948
Born 1925: A Novel of Youth (novel) 1948
Search after Sunrise (novel) 1951
Lady into Woman: A History of Women from Victoria to Elizabeth II (nonfiction) 1953
Testament of Experience: An Autobiographical Story of the Years 1925-1950 (autobiography) 1957
Selected Letters of Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain, 1920-1935 (letters) 1960
The Women at Oxford: A Fragment of History (nonfiction) 1960
The Rebel Passion: A Short History of Some Pioneer Peacemakers (nonfiction) 1964
Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity? (nonfiction) 1968
Chronicle of Youth: The War Diary 1913-1917 (diary) 1981
Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby (journalism) 1985
Chronicle of Friendship: Diary of the Thirties, 1932-1939 (diary) 1986
Testament of a Peace Lover: Letters from Vera Brittain (letters) 1988
Wartime Chronicle: Diary 1939-1945 (diary) 1989

CRITICISM

Muriel Mellown (essay date fall 1983)

SOURCE: Mellown, Muriel. "Reflections on Feminism and Pacifism in the Novels of Vera Brittain." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 2, no. 2 (fall 1983): 215-28.

[In the following essay, Mellown explores Brittain's treatment of feminist and pacifist themes in her five novels, asserting that the author conceived of her fictional works "as further weapons in her campaign for women," and that in them, "she wrote to analyze the existing conditions of society and to indicate the directions which future progress should take."]

It has been the common fate of feminists in the past to be first ridiculed, then ignored, and finally consigned to total obscurity. Outstanding among those whose work has in recent years been at least partially rescued from oblivion is Vera Brittain (1893-1970). Vera Brittain's early life has been the subject of a successful television

series, *Testament of Youth*; several of her books, including *Testament of Youth*, *Testament of Experience*, and *Testament of Friendship*, have been reissued in both England and the United States; and her early war diary has been published under the title *Chronicle of Youth*. Interest in Vera Brittain was further sparked when her daughter, Shirley Williams, became a founder of the new Social Democratic Party in England.

In many ways Vera Brittain represented the informed, liberal thinker of her day, and her work reflects the major intellectual trends which developed in England in the first half of the twentieth century. Feminism, socialism, and pacifism were throughout her life her principal concerns. She began her career in London in the early 1920s after three years' nursing in France and Malta during World War I and three years at Oxford University, where she received a degree in history in 1921. In 1922 she became a regular speaker for the League of Nations Union, which organization she considered "the one element of hope and progress contained in the peace treaties."¹ Two years later she joined the Labour Party and became active in politics, working with her husband, the political philosopher, George Catlin, in several parliamentary campaigns. During the years between the wars she established herself as a leading feminist journalist and contributed frequent reviews and articles to such periodicals as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Yorkshire Post*, *Time and Tide*, and the *Nation*. Her life took a somewhat different, though not unexpected, turn in the late 1930s. A pacifist since those early nursing days, when she had seen at first hand the horrors of trench warfare, Brittain now committed herself to the peace movement, and throughout the war pacifism claimed her exclusive attention. Only after 1945 was she free to resume her work for the advancement of women. In the last decades of her life she combined feminism and pacifism, continuing to work for both causes until her final illness.

A prolific writer, Vera Brittain issued a steady stream of works. When she died in 1970 she left, in addition to innumerable journal articles, twenty-nine books including novels, poetry, autobiographies, biographies, and sociological and political studies. Of these, *Testament of Youth* (1933), which describes her experiences in World War I, will certainly prove to be her most lasting achievement. But her five novels, *The Dark Tide* (1923), *Not Without Honour* (1924), *Honourable Estate* (1936), *Account Rendered* (1945), and *Born 1925* (1948), although almost completely unknown today, have considerable significance in that they record some of the major events and ideas of the time.

Brittain contended that a principal function of the novel is to reveal the impingement of public affairs on private lives. While acknowledging that her closeness to the events depicted prevented her from seeing them in their

final perspective, she nevertheless presented in her novels a picture of the main upheavals of the century. Drawing on her own experiences, often modelling her characters on real persons and tracing always the course of actual history, she rooted her novels firmly in fact. But their importance does not lie simply in their historical accuracy. Brittain conceived of these novels as further weapons in her campaign for women. In them, as surely as in her journalism, she wrote to analyze the existing conditions of society and to indicate the directions which future progress should take. She states her theory of the novel in the foreword to *Honourable Estate*, where she declares: "If large areas of human experience—political, economic, social, religious—are to be labelled inadmissible as subjects for fiction, then fiction is doomed as organic art."² The novels, then, provide a detailed statement of the concerns and principles common in feminist thought during the decades following the attainment of the vote.

The first two novels present the feminist view of education. Clearly they derived from the author's own struggles to break away from the conventional mold of the provincial young lady and win a place for herself in the intellectual world. *The Dark Tide*, begun while Brittain was still a student, tells the story of two young women who at the end of the war return to Oxford as undergraduates. Virginia Dennison, the more intellectual and assured of the two, turns down a proposal of marriage from a young don, Raymond Sylvester, who then marries her friend, Daphne Lethridge. The marriage proves to be a failure, largely because of Sylvester's selfishness and cruelty, and the novel ends with Daphne's determining to bring up her deformed son by herself. In later years Brittain admitted the obvious immaturity of the work, "the crude violence of its methods and the unmodified black-and-whiteness of its values."³ Yet it is important as an early indication of the author's fundamental concerns: it gives an accurate picture of the unnecessary restrictions imposed upon young women at Oxford in 1920; it traces the rapid deterioration of a marriage when the husband dominates his wife completely; and it reveals how a weak character such as Daphne may eventually gain courage and resolution from the "dark tide" of suffering.

While the first novel thus recounts the problems of undergraduate life, its successor, *Not Without Honour*, shows the other side of the coin, the difficulties which beset the intelligent young woman who is compelled to remain at home. The heroine, Christine Merivale, leaves school and returns to her home, a resort town on the North East coast. Here she rebels against the customary notion that she will sit at home until she marries. Her independent thinking on religion and marriage shocks her parents, and her friendship with a married curate of progressive views scandalizes the neighborhood. As in *The Dark Tide*, the feminist themes are clearly stated,