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Testament Of Youth (Movie Tie-In)



Synopsis

Now a major motion picture starring Alicia Vikander, Kit Harington, Hayley Atwell, and Taron Egerton — In 1915 Vera Brittain abandoned her studies at Oxford to enlist as a nurse in the armed forces, serving in London, in Malta, and at the Western Front in France. By war's end, all those closest to her were dead, and she had witnessed firsthand the destruction and suffering of modern combat. Much of what we know and feel about the First World War we owe to Brittain's *Testament of Youth*. In this elegiac yet unsparing memoir, Brittain focused on the men and women who came of age as war broke out, exploring their politics, their hopes, and their fatal idealism. Acclaimed by *The Times Literary Supplement* as a book that helped "both form and define the mood of its time," this searing portrait is also a testament to every generation irrevocably changed by war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Vera Brittain's memoir of her life just before, during, and just after World War One cuts like a diamond across heartbreak. It offers a unique, densely written female perspective of both her loss and the cost of war upon civilization. It is an amazing love story, family story and the story of her generation which sacrificed so profoundly. The first sentence of the book concisely paints the impact world events were to have on Brittain, her fiancé, her brother and their friends. "When the Great War broke out, it came to me not as a superlative tragedy, but as an interruption of the most exasperating kind to my personal plans." Brittain was a feminist whose desire was for an education and a wish to attend Oxford. This when women were not even awarded degrees for

attending. The book offers insight into British society and the expectations for middle class women before the war. Be a good dancer and find a husband. Britten instead earned her way into Oxford attending with her brother Edward and his friend Roland Leighton. She and Roland fell in love and he like her brother Edward and their friends all joined the Army (all at this time were volunteers as there was no draft or mandatory military service in 1914/15). Brittain seeing their sacrifice could no longer stay at Oxford and she enlisted to become a Voluntary Aid Detachment (V.A.D.) nurse. Much of the book tells of her service in England, Malta, and on the front lines in France where she even nursed wounded German soldiers. She tells of incompetence, jealousyTMs and lack of supplies but mostly she tells of what she experienced. This all in raw and vivid prose.

I agree w/ so many others that the book is absolutely beautiful in emotional expression. I'm a wounded combat veteran myself, and I feel that I understand Brittain's listlessness upon demobilization. She expressed the feelings so very well. I wonder, though, if Brittain's obsession w/ discovery efforts of whether or not her fiancé and brother died "gallantly", and in a "major push", doesn't undermine her later efforts at pacifism. Doesn't her effort contribute to a social expectation of "gallantry", and thus pressure young men into following suit, to avoid a "white feather"? It reminds me of Hector in the Iliad discussing the expectations of the Trojan women. Unfortunately, more must be written: according to her biography (A Life), Brittain falsely presented her brother as having died in action, when she knew by the time that this book went to press that his regimental commander (a man whom she had criticized in one of her poems) had given an entirely different story about his (her brother's) death. She left her readers w/ a false impression, and should (in my opinion) have downplayed his combat record to the barest facts. I recommend that the reader Google "Edward Brittain" and read an article from the British press ("Testament of Truth", Gue Gaisford, The Independent (London), 21 Oct '95) reviewing Vera Brittain: A Life (Berry & Bostridge, 1995). According to this British newspaper reviewer, Edward Brittain may have committed suicide, awaiting court martial for "immorality" (homosexuality, apparently also called "beastliness"). This failing of V. Brittain to set the record straight should be considered in critique of Testament of Youth. It is a failing that most readers will not have noted otherwise.

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