



Testament of Youth (Penguin Classics)

By Vera Brittain

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Testament of Youth (Penguin Classics) By Vera Brittain

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Much of what we know and feel about the First World War we owe to Vera Brittain's elegiac yet unsparing book, which set a standard for memoirists from Martha Gellhorn to Lillian Hellman. Abandoning her studies at Oxford in 1915 to enlist as a nurse in the armed services, Brittain served in London, in Malta, and on the Western Front. By war's end she had lost virtually everyone she loved. *Testament of Youth* is both a record of what she lived through and an elegy for a vanished generation. Hailed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as a book that helped "both form and define the mood of its time," it speaks to any generation that has been irrevocably changed by war.

This edition features a new introduction by Brittain's biographer examining her struggles to write about her experiences and the book's reception in England and America.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

When war broke out in August 1914, 21-year-old Vera Brittain was planning on enrolling at Somerville College, Oxford. Her father told her she wouldn't be able to go: "In a few months' time we should probably all find ourselves in the Workhouse!" he opined. Brittain had hoped to escape the Northern provinces, but the war seemingly dashed her plans. "It is not, perhaps, so very surprising that the War at first seemed to me an infuriating personal interruption rather than a world-wide catastrophe."

Her father eventually relented, however, and she was allowed to attend. By the end of her first year, she had fallen in love with a young soldier and resolved to become active in the war effort by volunteering as a nurse--turning her back on what she called her "provincial young-ladyhood." Brittain suffered through 12-hour days by reminding herself that nothing she endured was worse than what her fiancé, Roland, experienced in the trenches. Roland was expected home on leave for Christmas 1915; on December 26, Brittain received news that he had been killed at the front. Ten months later Brittain herself was sent to Malta and then to France to serve in the hospitals nearer the front, where she witnessed firsthand the horrors of battle. When peace finally came, Brittain had also lost her brother Edward and two close friends. As she walked the streets of London on November 11, 1918--Armistice Day--she felt alone in the crowds:

For the first time I realised, with all that full realisation meant, how completely everything that had hitherto made up my life had vanished with Edward and Roland, with Victor and Geoffrey. The War was over; a new age was beginning; but the dead were dead and would never return.

First published in 1933, *Testament of Youth* established Brittain as one of the best-loved authors of her time. Her crisp, clear prose and searing honesty make this unsentimental memoir of a generation scarred by war a classic. --*Sunny Delaney*

Review

"[*Testament of Youth*] remains one of the most powerful and widely read war memoirs of all time." —*The Guardian* (London)

About the Author

Vera Brittain (1893–1970) served as a nurse in the British armed forces in World War I and afterward devoted herself to the causes of peace and feminism. She wrote twenty-nine books, of which **Testament of Youth** is the best-known.

Mark Bostridge is a biographer and literary critic who lives in London.

Users Review

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Raymond Dahms:

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