

Ghent University

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy



**“There Was Only One Course left – to Tell my own Fairly
Typical Story as Truthfully as I Could against the Larger
Background.”**

An Intertextual Analysis of Vera Brittain's *Testament Of Youth*

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Masterproef voorgedragen tot het
behalen van de graad van
Master in de taal- en letterkunde:
Engels – Duits

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24 May 2016

Acknowledgements

The idea for this research originated in early 2015, when I was looking for a film to watch on an uneventful evening. A film with a game-of-thrones-actor caught my eye and, as I am quite interested in the First World War, the synopsis also seemed promising. The storyline, although highly romanticised as I was to discover later, intrigued me to the extent that I bought Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, the book on which the film was based, in the first Waterstone's I walked into. From the second chapter onwards I realised I wanted to write a research paper on Brittain's autobiography, because even that early in the book, it became clear that I was not reading a mere life story, but a fascinating intertextual construction, of which I eagerly wanted to know how its puzzle pieces fit together.

Therefore, I would like to use this foreword to thank everyone who has helped in making the research possible: first and foremost my supervisor prof. dr. Marysa Demoor, who not only provided great advice, but also allowed me to consult sources at the British Library, to which I otherwise would have had no access. For the latter reason I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Gert Buelens and Marita Dierick. Secondly I would like to thank prof. Van Puymbroeck for her classes on First World War literature, which introduced me to the framework I used as a basis for my research. Thirdly, I need to thank my family, both human and inhuman, for the support they have given me over the past year(s) and without whom I would not have been able to write anything at all. And lastly, a big thank you to the Fish family for giving me Beatrix Potter's "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" when I was five years old, which sparked my interest in the English language.

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(24545 words)

1. Introduction

The First World War was a catastrophe of a scale, both geographically and in terms of the number of human casualties, that had been unprecedented in Great Britain and the rest of the world. This first ever industrial war cost the lives of over nine million people of the total seventy million who served and many more continued to suffer from physical injuries or war neurosis after it had ended.¹

Many felt the need to write about their traumatic experiences during the Great War, both on the front and the Home Front. A wide range of literature by combatants and civilians was created. However, female writers were immediately forgotten right after the War because their work was supposed not to have the value of that of an eyewitness. Moreover, Goldman states that people felt that appreciating any other kind of War literature but that of the soldiers demeaned their suffering.²

Albrinck depicts the prejudices women and their literature had to deal with: “The canonisation of the soldier poets’ work ensured that their critique of women’s behavio[u]r in the war became part of the war’s official discourse on women. [...], their [own] status as soldiers gave them the authority of experience in telling the tale of the trenches”.³ Through canonisation of the trench poets, women were linked to civilian complacency and jingoism. The governmental discourse propagated them as proud mothers, because they were sending their sons to fight for their country. This role was criticised in the poems of the trench poets, such as Sassoon’s misogynistic “Glory of Women”. However, trench poets often disregarded the other role the government designated for women, nursing. Therefore they construed a model of two conflicting spheres: one of fighting at the front and a second sphere of complacency at the Home Front. This gave soldiers their authority to write on the horrors of War, disregarding what lies in between the two spheres: women on active service, who neither lived at the Home Front, nor fought in the trenches.

Recent studies, however, have started to look at what women have written during the First World War. Goldman points out the dangers of not doing so: she questions whether we should let our literature be determined only by men’s experiences, just because women, instead of writing about the trenches, chose to write about what they went through. No matter how

¹ Trudi Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 163.

² Dorothy Goldman, “Introduction,” in *Women and World War 1*, ed. Dorothy Goldman (London: Macmillan, 1993), 2.

³ Meg Albrinck, “Borderline Women: Gender Confusion in Vera Brittain’s and Evadne Price’s War Narratives,” *Narrative* 6, no. 3 (1998): 276.

different the struggles of men and women were, she raises the question whether those of women are less important.⁴

My bachelor research focussed on those trench poets, specifically on Siegfried Sassoon, who is known for his criticism towards women. When reading poems such as “Glory of Women”, it is easy to understand why women’s writings were overlooked, because they are depicted very negatively. Nevertheless my answer to Goldman’s question whether women’s literature should be granted an equal status to that of men is ‘yes’, because after reading Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* I have realised the critique on women is too one-sided. However different, their experiences bring another dimension to the way we interpret the War. I have chosen a prose work this time, because ed. Roberts states that “prose writers were able to reflect on the war and its effects on the young participants in a way which no poet accomplished. Vera Brittain is outstanding in this respect. She had faced the realities of war as a nurse in military hospitals, and suffered deeply felt personal losses”.⁵ I want to explore how she conveys this work and suffering.

In this research paper I will first explore the differences in gender roles between men and women before and during the War, particularly what that meant for their literature and canonisation. Whilst reading Brittain’s text, it is impossible to miss the amount of other texts she has incorporated into her autobiography. After an introduction to the concept of intertextuality, I will provide a chapter-by-chapter analysis of *Testament of Youth*, focussing on the relationship between the epigraphic poems and the intertextual references within their respective chapters. As Brittain uses both official documents and letters by soldiers who have experienced life at the front, hypothetically, Brittain’s intertextually should allow her to construct a narrative in which she establishes her authority to write on the War too. I will also explore whether the amount and kind of texts she uses remains the same in each of the three parts of *Testament of Youth* or whether there is a progression of some kind.

⁴ Goldman, “Introduction,” 2.

⁵ David Roberts, “Introduction,” in *Minds at War. Poetry and Experience of the First World War*, ed. David Roberts, 9th ed. (Hurst: Saxon Books, 2014), 14.

2. Vera Brittain

Vera Brittain was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1893. She grew up in rural England as the eldest of the two children of the Brittains. At school, she excelled and through the encouragement of some forward-looking teachers, she cherished the desire to go to university to escape Buxton's snobbery. Despite her father's initial opposition, Brittain was allowed to attempt to secure a place at Somerville College, which she succeeded in, even though women were not allowed membership of the University itself.⁶ However, her initial academic career lasted but until the end of her first year, as she decided to suspend her studies to become a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment. As a VAD Brittain nursed in England, Malta and ultimately, France, where she had to care for German soldiers, which would further deepen her pacifist ideas, which are notable in her writings since the beginning of the war. Between the years of 1914 and 1918 Brittain was not only carrying the burden of working in military hospitals, but also suffered personal losses: in 1915 she lost her fiancé, in 1917 she lost two dear friends and in 1918 she lost her only brother, with whom she had shared a close connexion. After recovering from the mental strain of these events, Brittain studied History at Somerville College in order to understand how international politics had created an environment in which a whole generation was sacrificed for the benefit of authorities, who never experienced the war first-hand. During the 1920s she became a journalist and novelist, especially renowned for her pacifist, as an advocate of the League of Nations, and feminist writings. In 1933 *Testament of Youth* was published, which, according to Buck, "epitomizes the war memoir for many readers".⁷ In this memoir Brittain describes her journey from a Victorian childhood to a post-war adulthood and the destruction induced by the war in between. The aim of this memoir was for people to understand the loss and labour she experienced, so another war the size of the Great War could be prevented.⁸ She would continue to advocate feminism and pacifism until her death in 1970.⁹ According to Marc Bostridge Brittain, near the end of her life, believed she had been forgotten but she anticipated that a new generation would discover *Testament of Youth* after her death.¹⁰ This prediction has been correct as *Testament of Youth* has been adapted for

⁶ Paul O'Prey, ed., *First World War. Poems from the Front* (London: IWM, 2014), 113.

⁷ Claire Buck, "British Women's Writing of the Great War," in *The Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 89.

⁸ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth. An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, ed. Mark Bostridge (London: Virago, 2004), xxv.

⁹ Muriel Mellown, "Reflections on Feminism and Pacifism in the Novels of Vera Brittain," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 2, no. 2 (1983): 216.

¹⁰ Mark Bostridge, "Vera's Testament is young again," *The Telegraph*, 21 May, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9228971/Veras-Testament-is-young-again.html>.

the screen multiple times and recent studies have shown more interest in the First World War literature of women.

3. Gender and the Great War

Buck regards *Testament of Youth* as a work that tries to redefine the front, which was generally seen as a masculine space and aims to reveal how femininity worked there alongside masculinity.¹¹ However, Brittain's struggle with gender roles started much earlier, that is with the impediments she encountered in her education. After pleading her father on multiple occasions to let her attend university and when she noticed how different she and Edward are treated regarding education, she quotes her own pre-war diary: "It feels sad to be a woman! I wrote in March 1913".¹² Even though Queen Victoria had passed away several years before, the Victorian gender conventions persisted.

Before the analysis of *Testament of Youth*, I will look into the gender conventions of wartime England, because I tend to agree with Bader Zaar, Hämmerle and Überegger, that war literature should not be analysed without sufficient knowledge of the gender conventions at the time.¹³ Whether this is true for all war literature remains to be seen; nevertheless, in Brittain's case studying the established gender roles is valuable as the aforementioned quote indicates that she was questioning gender from very early on in her autobiographical account.

3.1 Gender in everyday life

The Great War disrupted the Victorian gender conventions, as women were needed to do work that was previously done by men at the Home Front because the latter were fighting abroad. As a consequence, the Home Front was seen as a feminine sphere, contrasting with the masculine sphere of the front.¹⁴ ¹⁵ However, women's work was not solely confined to their motherland: many also worked at the front as nurses, ambulance drivers, etc. Therefore "women's mass entry into previously male jobs fundamentally changed the period's dominant assumptions about women's capacities and proper role in the home".¹⁶ This active engagement with the war was recorded and published both during and after the war.

In *Testament of Youth* Brittain combines Buck's changed "assumptions about women's capacities" with First World War womanhood as described by Bader Zaar, Hämmerle and

¹¹ Buck, "British Women's Writing of the Great War," 106.

¹² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 42.

¹³ Birgitta Bader Zaar, Christa Hämmerle, and Oswald Überegger, „Introduction: Women's and Gender History of the First World War – Topics, Concepts, Perspectives,“ in *Gender and the First World War*, ed. Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger, and Birgitta Bader Zaar (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 1.

¹⁴ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 272.

¹⁵ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, "Introduction," 1.

¹⁶ Buck, "British Women's Writing of the Great War," 85.

Überegger. The latter argue, in contrast to Buck, that the ideal of soldierly masculinity, which had been prominent during the wars of the previous century, was exalted even more than it was before.¹⁷ Even before the outbreak of the war Brittain complains about how her brother Edward's scholastic merits at his military school were always seen as much more valuable than those of herself. Their typically Victorian family lived by the rule that "[...] what mattered was not the quality of the work, but the sex of the worker".¹⁸ She would later suffer from the more extremely differed gender roles that the war generated. However, she again challenged those roles by becoming one of the women who tried to help where they could, as she had challenged the belief that a woman should not go to university.

The reason that the Home Front has been designated as a feminine sphere is due to the higher public visibility of women during the war as women were forced to replace men on the labour market, when the latter left for the front.¹⁹ One of their jobs was to make munitions for the soldiers. Moreover, they also appeared more prominently in the public space by means of showing their support for their fighting men and home nations; feminists especially distinguished themselves in this respect.²⁰ In the interest of safeguarding order these gender roles were promoted by authorities and by the Press:

[The war-related extension of female work] was accompanied by a dense discursive 'mobilisation of femininity', developed and propagated both by women involved and by male-dominated politics and (visual) media. [...] discourses on motherhood and allegedly natural female roles and tasks such as devotion, self-abandonment, love and care for others prevailed or were even reaffirmed during wartime, as research has revealed in detailed studies.²¹

Throughout *Testament of Youth* Vera Brittain is also confronted with this discrepancy between female emancipation and the reinforcement of the classical female gender role: as a nurse working on the front, she serves her country in taking up the female role of a caring, mothering figure, who tends to the soldiers, but at the same time she is also defying the idea that the front is an exclusively masculine sphere. The latter proves that women surpassed the tradition gender roles by going to the front lines, where, on top of the well-known function as a nurse, they served as car-drivers and spies or they joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps from 1917 onwards.²²

¹⁷ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, "Introduction," 1.

¹⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 42.

¹⁹ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, "Introduction," 2.

²⁰ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, "Introduction," 2.

²¹ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, "Introduction," 3.

²² Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, "Introduction," 3.

However Bader Zaar, Hämmerle and Überegger point out that 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”.²³ Furthermore, Bader Zaar, Hämmerle and Überegger remind their readers that no matter how many actively participated in the life at the front, the prevailing concepts of femininity and masculinity in the public spheres were the continuation of the tradition gender concepts.²⁴

An important concept, which supports these findings, is that of Margaret R. and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet’s ‘double helix’. The double helix is a model that represents traditional gender roles and has in further studies also been found suitable to illustrate the situation during the Great War. One strand of the helix represents femininity, the other masculinity; therefore both are always opposing each other and the female strand is always subordinate.²⁵ Regarding the Great War, this dichotomy has been analysed as parallel to the division between the Home Front and the Front. Moreover Bader Zaar, Hämmerle and Überegger note that propaganda used the model to construe “a polarised set of gender concepts for the purpose of maintaining order. Here, gender was a weapon of modern warfare, putting immense moral pressure on men and women” (4).

3.2 Gender and Literature

The importance of literature during and after the war is not to be underestimated: the Press was filled with lies and propaganda²⁶ and both Press and letters were censored under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA).²⁷ This is exemplified in the letter communication between Brittain and her brother, who wrote the following to her in a letter, whilst he was at the front just before the Battle of the Somme:

‘I am sure you will be interested to hear that we have quite a lot of celery growing near our present position.’ (‘The celery is ripe’ was for some obscure reason the phrase chosen by us to indicate that an attack was about to come off.) ‘It is ripening quickly

²³ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, “Introduction,” 3.

²⁴ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, “Introduction,” 3.

²⁵ Bader Zaar, Hämmerle, and Überegger, “Introduction,” 4

²⁶ Tate, „The First World War: British Writing,“ 162.

²⁷ John A. Hutcheson, “Defence of the Realm Act (Dora),” in *The Encyclopededia of World War I. A Political, Social and Military History*, ed. Spencer C. Tucker. Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2005), 341.

although it is being somewhat delayed by this cold and wet weather we are having lately, and if the weather continues better I expect it will be in about a week'.²⁸

The siblings had to use a code if they wanted to talk about war events at the front. As a result thereof, the role of literature was to provide a critical outlook on the war, because this was not allowed in the Press. Even though the works of the trench poets are often seen as epitomes of First World War literature, both combatants and civilians produced diverse works in a range of genres. Examples are “combatants’ memoirs and fiction, memoirs by nurses and other civilian participants”, which vary in their outlook on the war (patriotic, propagandist, critical ...) and in style (traditional or modernist).²⁹

Unfortunately for female authors, male (soldier-)authors were associated with “experience” and first-hand accounts of what happened at the front and in the trenches. The accounts of their experiences make up a continuum from patriotic to expressing “sheer pointlessness of the men’s endurance” and often their poetry accounts for a shift from the former to the latter.³⁰ War novels on the other hand mostly deal with the subject of middle-class men who try to act as gentlemen while they were fighting at the front and enduring life in the trenches.³¹ Because of the focus on their experiences in the trenches, prose and poetry written by soldiers at the Front were thought to be more authentic through their combatant realism, whereas women and the Home Front represented jingoism and war propaganda to the general public, even though both genders, and not just women, wrote many poems, prose works and plays in favour of the war.³² In this respect Buck touches upon a poem by Siegfried Sassoon, namely “Glory of Women”, which I discussed in my bachelor paper³³. Whereas Buck accentuates the connection between women and naivety in Sassoon’s poem, I also want to point out line 5a: “You make us shells”.³⁴ The literal meaning alludes to women’s new gender role as manufactures of shells at the Home Front, which were then used by the soldiers at the front. Figuratively however, this line implies that women make men into “empty shells”, because they are pleased when men fight and die for their country. Research has falsified this stereotype: women literature’s content and attitude towards the war was just as varied as the genres they used to express their opinions.

²⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 246.

²⁹ Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” 162.

³⁰ Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” 161, 164.

³¹ David Trotter, “The British Novel and the War,” in *The Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35.

³² Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 87, 100.

³³ Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 87.

³⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, “Glory of Women,” in *Siegfried Sassoon: The War Poems*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber&Faber, 2014), 89.

Soldiers at the front mostly chose poetry as their means of expression and women were no different between 1914 and 1918.³⁵ In *Testament of Youth* Brittain also incorporated poems by herself and by Roland Leighton, that correspond to the events of the chapters they introduce. Autobiographies and (fictionalised) war memoirs published by women functioned as counterparts to the personal accounts of soldiers, their value depending on the emotive side of feminine writing.³⁶ But again their topic matter was diverse: some encouraged men to go to war, whereas other writers chose to use a pacifist discourse as an attempt to stop the Great War and prevent war in the future. Vera Brittain can be categorised as belonging to the latter category.

Tate argues that both men and women felt like they were sent to war by a generation that was practically untouched by the war and therefore both expressed their resentment in literature.³⁷ The difference is that women writers had to work to “establish their authority to speak about war in a masculine economy”, which I will demonstrate in my analysis of *Testament of Youth*.³⁸

3.3 Consequence for Brittain

Brittain laments the inequality between men and women in her society when she has lost all hope of ever going to Oxford, just before Sir John Marriott visits:

Women have still a long way to travel before their achievements are likely to be assessed without irrelevant sex considerations entering in to bias the judgement of the critic, and even their recent political successes are not yet so secure that those who profit by them can afford to dispense with the few acknowledged feminists who are still vigilant, and still walk warily along once forbidden paths.³⁹

In this passage she is commenting on the situation in the 1930s, when she wrote *Testament of Youth*. In the following years women writers of the Great War would gradually be forgotten in favour of the more “authentic” writings by men. Even though women were forced to give up their newly acquired, more independent gender role after the Great War, the War did help in their economic, social and sexual emancipation according to Claire Buck.⁴⁰

Whilst she was writing *Testament of Youth*, Brittain herself commented on the role of women during the war and the importance of their writing about it:

³⁵ Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 88-89.

³⁶ Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 105,107.

³⁷ Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” 170.

³⁸ Albrinck, “Borderline Women,” 271.

³⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 142.

⁴⁰ Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 85.

The war was a phase of life in which women's experience did differ vastly from men's and I make no puerile claim to equality of suffering and service when I maintain that any picture of the war years is incomplete which omits those aspects that mainly concerned women [...] The woman is still silent who, by presenting the war in its true perspective in her own life, will illuminate its meaning afresh for its own generation.⁴¹ British women's writing of the Great War would not be discussed until the rise of feminist scholarship in the 1980s.⁴² Buck denotes "the equation of women with a civilian Home Front that could never successfully comprehend the war experience of the soldier" as the main reason that the rediscovery of these women and their writings took almost seventy years⁴³.

⁴¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, xv.

⁴² Buck, "British Women's Writing of the Great War," 85.

⁴³ Buck, "British Women's Writing of the Great War," 87.

4. Intertextuality

Before I explore the different levels of intertextuality in *Testament of Youth* and how they contribute to Brittain's assertion of herself as an individual who has the authority of speaking about the Great War, I will first explain the methodological framework I have used for my research, as intertextuality is a many-faceted concept. Intertextuality is said to have "paved the way for surprising insights into reality and literature"⁴⁴, which will also prove to be true for *Testament of Youth*.

Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality' in the 1960s. According to Slembrouck this "processual state", which intertextuality is, caused texts and the reception thereof to be politicised – in other words, the production of meaning is not just bound to the text itself, but is linked to context, tradition and other texts.⁴⁵ Definitions of the term differentiated in the following years: in the 1990s intertextuality was considered to be of great importance to map the link between discourse and social context.⁴⁶ Its main functions were then "to show how texts draw upon orders of discourse", to indicate "conventionalised practices" which people use in particular situations and to draw attention "to how texts transform the social and historical resources, how texts mix and 're-accentuate' genres (discourses, narratives, registers)".⁴⁷ This third function, which is also highlighted by Juvan as "interwovenness with a social and historical network of discourses"⁴⁸, will be paramount to my research, as it shows that Vera Brittain's diary and letters from the War years get a new meaning when used in the novel. Moreover, she mixes genres by combining autobiographical elements with poetry, which relate to one another within one work.

Slembrouck further explores Fairclough's distinction between manifest intertextuality and constitutive intertextuality. The former indicates instances where other texts are quoted directly in a text – that is, reported speech –, the latter is to be seen as a synonym to interdiscursivity, which is linked to the use of genre conventions and set discourses.⁴⁹ As the extent to which texts implement both of these forms differs, it will be interesting to see how heterogeneity works in *Testament of Youth*. Slembrouck indicates some possible results of the mixing of genres and conventions, which are: (i) the explanation of the producer of text's

⁴⁴ Mark Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality* (West Lafayette: Purdue, 2008), 179.

⁴⁵ Stef Slembrouck, "Intertextuality," *Discursive Pragmatics*, ed. Jan Zienkowski, Jan-Ola Östman, and Jef Verschueren, vol. 8 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 156-157.

⁴⁶ Slembrouck, "Intertextuality," 158.

⁴⁷ Slembrouck, "Intertextuality," 159.

⁴⁸ Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*, 180.

⁴⁹ Slembrouck, "Intertextuality," 159.

creative responses to something that happened in the outer reality and (ii) the ability to illustrate competing voices.⁵⁰ Both are relevant to *Testament of Youth*. On the one hand Brittain mixes different kinds of prose and poetry. Juvan argues that literature constructs literature, which means that genre conventions either lead to “thematic, stylistic or genre continuities” or, in Brittain’s case, lead to conscious alteration of genre conventions.⁵¹ She has composed her autobiography in such a way that the prose helps to clarify the poetry and vice versa. On the other hand it must be taken into account that *Testament of Youth* was published in 1933. Therefore Brittain does not only mix the Vera Brittain who experienced the Great War as a nurse with her male and female contemporaries, but she also mixes that Vera with the Vera Brittain she is at the time she wrote *Testament of Youth*. This distance allows her to “compete” with the other voices and opinions in the novel. Moreover Brittain explores different discourses within her autobiography.

Another form of intertextuality, Brittain uses, is “sequential implicativeness”: this phenomenon occurs when the language producer reiterates (part of) the text someone has previously used; this previous text could have been uttered in the previous conversational turn or it can be any piece of discourse.⁵² Reiterating thus illustrates that you have listened and that you understand the discourse. In *Testament of Youth* the young Brittain clearly uses this technique in her letter communication to Roland Leighton. Moreover, Brittain as the narrator similarly uses texts that have been written or spoken many years before she wrote her autobiography and thus converses with them.

Lastly Slembrouck explores the dangers of (manifest) intertextuality through re-contextualisation: quotation can cause a text to be misinterpreted because the original context is not heeded.⁵³ Brittain is not only able to avoid misinterpretation because she wrote a lot of the original texts, but she also tries to explain the context in which these texts were produced, even though the context of an autobiography differs from the context in which the incorporated ephemera were written. A second example of re-contextualisation is her use of poetry at the beginning of each chapter: most of the poems were not written to be put in an autobiography, but when inserted therein they help construct the semantic value of the text. Slembrouck also recognizes this phenomenon: “[...] text travels from context to context and as a result, it will not only enter into new differential orderings between textual artefacts and be surrounded by

⁵⁰ Slembrouck, “Intertextuality,” 161.

⁵¹ Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*, 181.

⁵² Slembrouck, “Intertextuality,” 163-164.

⁵³ Slembrouck, “Intertextuality,” 165.

changed conditions of response, uptake, commentary and explanation; its textuality itself will at the same time be contextually contingent”.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Slembrouck, “Intertextuality,” 173.

5. Intertextuality in *Testament of Youth*

5.1 The Title and Genre Tradition

In his work, Juvan argues that “literary works assume their genre identity by way of intertextuality”.⁵⁵ According to this definition, a genre is a conglomerate of literary conventions, stabilised by the repeated use of combinations of these conventions by writers. Subsequently, writers consider what has been previously written within a genre and adopt similar elements in their writings, thus preserving the established characteristics per genre. As I aim to look into how Brittain presents her reader with different kinds and amounts of intertextuality and whether this differs within the different parts of the novel, I will first elaborate on the genre question of *Testament of Youth*, as Brittain’s “autobiographical study”⁵⁶ does not lend itself to a straightforward categorisation, because I suspect the combination of genres helps her to claim authority.

The title and subtitle of Brittain’s monography indicate the difficulty of classifying the work within one genre. According to the title the work is a testament, whereas the subtitle labels it as an autobiography. Moreover, it can be seen as an elegiac text because it “enact[s] the classic female task of mourning the dead soldier”.⁵⁷ She uses a somewhat traditional form to convey her personal losses and the universality of bereavement in all of Europe.⁵⁸ In this sense, *Testament of Youth* can be read as an elegy for a whole generation. Brittain herself also recognises the work’s propagandist potential for preventing future catastrophes.⁵⁹ This illustrates that the traditional way of looking at a text as belonging to a single genre needs to be revised, as Juvan suggests: “intertextuality destroyed the monistic hierarchy of inclusion that assigned each text to a certain literary kind, the kind to a genre, and the genre to literature as a metagenre”.⁶⁰ Through intertextuality Brittain has interwoven various genres within one work. In what follows I will look at some of the main genre labels the monography has been given.

⁵⁵ Juvan, “Intertextuality,” 182.

⁵⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, title page.

⁵⁷ Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 94.

⁵⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

⁵⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, xxv.

⁶⁰ Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*, 183.

5.1.1 Testament

A testament is a personal document in which someone states what he or she leaves to their kin. In *Testament of Youth* the loss of the youth, something abstract, of a whole generation is described. Whether they died or not, what they leave behind for the following generation is their knowledge and experience, which should help prevent a future war⁶¹. Therefore the propagandist function fits in with the categorisation as a testament.^{62 63}

Secondly, the word ‘Testament’ is derived from the Latin ‘testor’, which means ‘witness’.⁶⁴ Badenhausein argues that Brittain distances herself from the events by giving the work this title and assumes a spectator position, as is supposed to be natural for a woman.⁶⁵ However, in my opinion Brittain defies this general role by incorporating both the soldier’s and her own experiences into one book, as I will explain further on.

5.1.2 Elegy

In *Testament of Youth* Brittain mixes the previously mentioned propagandist agenda with her own insistence on memorialising her deceased friends Victor Richardson and Geoffrey Thurlow, her brother Edward Brittain and her fiancé Roland Leighton. Mourning, according to Badenhausein, relieves Brittain from passiveness as it does not involve an act of passive spectatorship.⁶⁶ Badenhausein thus contradicts himself as he later in his article states that Brittain is passive in her witnessing, as I previously mentioned. Through mourning, Brittain actively engages with her past. “Brittain’s memoir provides her with a form in which she might make sense of her trauma”⁶⁷, which she does by communicating with the dead.

5.1.3 Autobiography/ Nurse Memoir

Buck categorises *Testament of Youth* as a “formally conventional memoir appropriate to her intense desire to convey the historical experience of her youth”.⁶⁸ Trudi Tate similarly focuses on Brittain’s “powerful account of her nursing experiences”, the psychological effects of the losses she experienced and her thoughts on the futility of war.⁶⁹ Throughout the monography,

⁶¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, xxvi.

⁶² Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 107.

⁶³ Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” 161.

⁶⁴ Richard Badenhausein, “Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth*” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 4 (2003), 429.

⁶⁵ Badenhausein, “Mourning through Memoir,” 429.

⁶⁶ Badenhausein, “Mourning through Memoir,” 422.

⁶⁷ Badenhausein, “Mourning through Memoir,” 437.

⁶⁸ Buck, “British Women’s Writing of the Great War,” 106.

⁶⁹ Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” 164.

Brittain indeed pays a lot of attention to her experiences as a nurse. However, I disagree with Buck's statement that *Testament of Youth* is "formally conventional", because of Brittain's incorporation of intertextual references, of which the poems at the beginning of each chapter are but one example.

According to Albrinck *Testament of Youth* is an effort to reclaim appraisal for the women's wartime experiences: by using the nurse as a central figure, the work should balance out the negative depiction of women by the trench poets and prose-writing soldiers.⁷⁰ However, Brittain's experiences as a nurse are only explored near the end of the first part and the whole second part of the work. As I will indicate, the other parts also serve to counter the negative portrayal of women as complacent stereotypes. This also one of the effects of the work being an autobiography, instead of a fictional account/biography: because Brittain tells her own story, there is a smaller distance between the author and the reader. She also touches upon this in her foreword, where she discusses the creation of the work: a fictional account felt like "a hopeless failure" to Brittain.⁷¹

5.1.4 The Aim of Combining Genres

In sum, Brittain primarily incorporates elements from three different genres: the testament, the elegy and the (nurse) memoir. A memoir is highly personal, because it presents the events as the author perceived them. The elegiac aspect involves both personal and communal mourning. The categorisation as a testament is the most abstract as a testament is an official document. Moreover is the word 'testament' in the title combined with an abstract noun, which therefore highlights the impersonality and objectivity of Brittain's account. In other words, Britain combines genres to guarantee the truthfulness of her memoir: on the one hand she feels that only a personal narration might be of value to the truth of the experience of war, whereas on the other hand the title insists on the impersonality of her portrayal of events. Even though she does not relate it to the different genres, Brittain states in her foreword that she aimed to "tell [her] own fairly typical story as truthfully as [she] could against the larger background".⁷² This means that she attempts to speak for the whole generation, both male and female, that lost its youth. She therefore uses the combination of these genres, objective and subjective, to claim the authority to speak about the war. In what follows, I will look into the text more closely to

⁷⁰ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 278.

⁷¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, xxvi.

⁷² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, xxvi.

see how intertextuality further helps her to counter the belief that women should not write about the war.

5.2 Poems, Parts and Chapters

Testament of Youth is divided into three large parts, each of which is introduced by a text written by a different author, chosen by Brittain. She has also incorporated a poem, at the beginning of each chapter. In what follows I will explore how the inserted texts and poems relate to the parts and chapters they introduce and thus examine the effects of this manifest intertextuality in Fairclough's sense. The work consists of eleven chapters: seven of the introductory poems were written by Brittain and five by Roland Leighton, an almost even distribution. Leighton's poems introduce at least one chapter of each part and are therefore also allowed to communicate his thoughts after his death. Even though his poems are more frequent in the first part of the work than Brittain's, who wrote only two out of five poems of the first part, she will always introduce the first chapter of each part, after the introduction of the part by an external author to establish herself as a prominent commentator.

Badenhausen argues that Brittain uses the poems as an attempt to stabilise her autobiography, but denotes any specification as to what this means as "complicated".⁷³ The poems serve to establish Brittain's authority claim to write about the First World War. She achieves this by interrelating the poems with other instances of intertextuality throughout the chapters they introduce: therefore *Testament of Youth* seems to be a carefully constructed text, which semantically relies strongly on the incorporation of other texts, as indicated by the high frequency of intertextual references.

⁷³ Badenhausen, "Mourning through Memoir," 439.

5.2.1 Part I

The first part, and incidentally the whole work, opens with an extract from a fairy tale from *The Pink Fairy Book*, which was edited by Andrew Lang.⁷⁴ This particular fairy tale was originally found by Laura Gonzenbach in Sicily and later translated into German. In the included passage a fortunate girl named Catherine is asked by a woman whether she would rather have a happy youth or a happy old age. Catherine prefers the old age because she then has something to look forward to. The last line of the extract ominously indicates that this will be “poor” Catherine’s fate.⁷⁵

The first part of *Testament of Youth* opens in a similar positive way to Catherine’s story in the extract: the young Vera Brittain, who grows up in a loving family, ultimately gets the chance to attend Somerville College and acquires a commendable suitor. However, in the case of Brittain’s generation no such luxury as to choose between a happy youth and a happy old age was offered to them: their happy youth was compromised by the start of the Great War.

Brittain has constructed the work in such a way that the texts which open the parts and chapters actively interact with those in the text itself, not only thematically, but also a lot more direct. Catherine’s story is not just chosen because it fits Brittain’s experiences, but also because she tells how she had first encountered the tale in a very different context: “When I exhausted my own nursery literature – a few volumes of Andrew Lang’s fairy-tales [...]”⁷⁶ She therefore both re-contextualises the story, as well as introduces the context in which she originally read it, creating different kinds of intertextual engagement with the fairy tale. She will use this technique constantly throughout *Testament of Youth*.

The fact that a fairy tale introduces the first part indicates Brittain’s own innocence and ignorance at the time. Fairy tales usually contain an instructive moral, but are nevertheless fictional accounts. This relates to the part because Brittain’s contact with the War is mostly superficial until she leaves the Buxton hospital and until she experiences real loss by her fiancé’s death. Therefore the War, in the beginning, was so far away from her that it almost seemed fictional. Secondly her pre-war life is also fairy-tale-like in its lack of the destructiveness of the War.

⁷⁴ Appendix 1

⁷⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 1.

⁷⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 11.

5.2.1.1 “Forward From Newcastle” and “The War Generation: Ave”

“The War Generation: Ave”

In cities and in hamlets we were born,
And little towns behind the van of time;
A closing era mocked our guileless dawn
 With jingles of military rhyme.
But in that song we heard no warning chime,
Nor visualised in hours benign and sweet
The threatening woe that our adventurous feet
 Would starkly meet.

Thus we began, amid the echoes blown
Across our childhood from an earlier war,
Too dim, too soon forgotten, to dethrone
Those dreams of happiness we thought secure;
While, imminent and fierce outside the door,
 Watching a generation grow to flower,
The fate that held our youth within its power
 Waited its hour.

The first chapter of *Testament of Youth* begins with a poem Brittain wrote in 1932: “The War Generation: Ave”. Formally the poem is a slightly diverging sonnet, as it consists of two eight-line stanzas, of which the first seven are written in iambic pentameter followed by the eighth line in iambic dimeter. The rhyme scheme of the first stanza is a b a b b c. By contrast, the rhyme scheme of the second stanza is less regular: d e d f e h h. Lines 10, 12 and 13 end with the words “war”, “secure” and “door” respectively; all of these words end in different vowels followed by a [r]- /schwa-sound, and thus construe pararhyme. The lines in dimeter, which seem cut short in comparison to the other lines, and the pararhyme, i.e. word endings that do not rhyme perfectly, support the content of the poem, as will be explained in the following paragraph.

The poem deals with the innocence of Brittain’s generation during their childhood. More specifically it focusses on the imminent catastrophe, triggered by the political decisions of older generations. The first two lines of the first stanza set the scene, zooming in on what seemed an idealised and Romantic childhood, untouched by time and modernity: “And little towns behind the van of time” (l. 2). The following four lines announce that danger is on its way because of the military decisions of the late nineteenth century. However, the vocabulary again suggests the innocence and naivety of the generation born in the late nineteenth century: The older generation “mocked” them (l. 3), they did not condemn them to a horrible fate, but solely

“mocked”. Further she speaks light-heartedly of “jingles of a military rhyme” (l. 4), “no warning chime” (l. 5) and “hours benign and sweet” (l. 6). Within the chapter she says she heard military songs from babyhood onwards.⁷⁷ Throughout this first stanza Brittain used a lot of [i] and [i:] sounds, which make the stanza sound light, again emphasizing the innocence. Lines 5-8 are one sentence, of which the main clause starts in line 6. However, the actual object, which in natural discourse would immediately follow the verb, is not introduced until the start of line 7. This sentence structure, along with the contrast to the previously mentioned harmless vocabulary, emphasizes “the threatening woe”, which will end the younger generation’s era of innocence. The last line of this stanza “Would starkly meet” continues the iambic rhythm, but feels as if it has been cut short, because it is significantly shorter than the previous lines. The abrupt stop of this line has an ominous effect, particularly after the introduction of a threatening woe.

Line 9a refers back to the first stanza and the innocence of the childhood of Brittain’s generation: “Thus we began”. Contrastingly, the rest of the second stanza is characterised by war discourse. Instead of “jingles of a military rhyme”, the remains of the South African War of the late nineteenth century are now “echoes | across our childhood from an earlier war” (ll. 9b-10). In the following line these echoes can be heard as the sound of gun shots in the sound pattern, which at the same time anticipate the Great War: “**T**oo **d**im, too soon forgotten, to **d**ethrone” (l. 11). The last four lines are built in a similar way to lines 5-8. Here two sub-clauses precede the subject of the sentence, “the fate”, which is introduced in line 15:

While, imminent and fierce outside the door,
Watching a generation grow to flower,
The fate that held our youth within its power
Waited its hour. (ll. 13-16)

The ominous prediction of the last line is anticipated by the use of the aforementioned parhyme. Moreover the last line starts with a trochaic substitution – a trochee is used instead of an iamb – which disrupts the meter. This line is also again shorter than the previous lines and this, combined with the ominous content and sound pattern of the poem, foretells the cutting short of the lives of many of the children in the first stanza.

In sum “The War Generation: Ave” describes the childhood of the generation that would be sent to war: militarism never really went away after the wars of the previous century, but were combined with a happy and naïve childhood of people, who did not see the impending threat. Through this poem Brittain starts the autobiography with her personal interpretation of

⁷⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 7.

the Great War, whilst also emphasising that the catastrophe affected her whole generation. Despite the insistence on her innocence, Brittain uses the poem and the chapter as an argument for her being allowed to write about the War and to warn the next generation not to commit the same mistakes. Firstly, after the first paragraph, which consists of only one sentence, she links herself to trench poet Robert Graves in the second paragraph, albeit superficially, through a shared childhood memory of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.⁷⁸ Secondly, she attempts to present herself as an intelligent person by listing what she read during her childhood, including Longfellow, Dickens and Shelley.

Thirdly, gender inequality is criticised by Brittain: this focus on the subordinate role of women will continue throughout *Testament of Youth* to indicate that it is an invalid social construct. Brittain depicts men as wanting to take advantage of women in horrible ways by relating how she was harassed by a man on a train at the age of fourteen. His obscene questions are reported in direct speech to portray their awfulness: "Pretty little girls like you shouldn't bite their nails," he murmured playfully, examining my fingers. "You'll stop biting them to please me, won't you? – and give me a kiss to show that we're pals?"⁷⁹ By focussing on the faults of men, she challenges negative ideas surrounding women.

Disproving women's ignorance and passivity is particularly significant in establishing Brittain as a War authority, because it proves that not all women, who lived during the war, were to be viewed as negatively as the image created by canonisation. She distances herself from ignorant women through intertextuality too, by comparing her bitterness after Leighton's death with what a more complacent friend, Mina, said: "you never really cared for Roland; you only wanted him out of ambition! If you'd really loved him you could not possibly have behaved in the way you've done the past few weeks!"⁸⁰ The distance between Mina and Brittain is created by use of manifest intertextuality: Brittain directly quotes Mina's words to show that this is Mina's opinion and that she herself is less complacent and therefore more suited to write about the War.

⁷⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 4.

⁷⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 31.

⁸⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 20.

5.2.1.2 “Provincial Young-Ladyhood“ and “In the Rose-Garden”

“In the Rose-Garden”

Dew on the pink-flushed petals,
Roseate wings unfurled;
What can, I though, be fairer
In all the world?

Steps that were fain but faltered
(What could she else have done?)
Passed from the arbour’s shadow
Into the sun.

Noon and a scented glory,
Golden and pink and red;
‘What after all are roses
To me?’ I said.

The second chapter of *Testament of Youth* is titled “Provincial Young-Ladyhood”. Instead of giving her own response to the chapter’s events in a poem, Brittain starts off chapter II with a poem by Roland Leighton. This signals his significance, as Leighton is the only person, except for Brittain, who introduces chapters with his poems. In his poem, “In the Rose-Garden” Leighton describes his encounter with Brittain on the Uppingham Speech Day.

Formally the poem is more complex than Brittain’s poem of the previous chapter: it consists of twelve lines, divided into three four-line stanzas. Within each of these quatrains the meter varies: Leighton mixes rising (iambes) and falling feet (dactyls, trochees). Here, falling can be interpreted as falling in love, which is then rendered positive by the rising feet, that conclude each stanza. The poem thus ends on a positive note both formally and thematically.

The first and second stanza describe the loveliness of the rose garden and the arrival of a female person respectively. In lines 11 and 12 the narrator wonders what roses mean to himself: “‘What after all are roses | to me?’ I said”. Brittain’s craftsmanship of manifest intertextuality and re-contextualisation is indicated by the fact that the rest of the chapter serves to answer this question: it discloses what roses meant to both Leighton, who asks the question by writing the poem, and Brittain, who asks the same question by incorporating the poem into her text.

The poem also helps to establish the authority of *Testament of Youth*: the last line of “In the Rose-Garden” is highly personal as a personal pronoun referring to the lyrical ‘I’ is mentioned twice within a very short line (“to **me**?’ **I** said”). Even though it was written before the outbreak of the war in Great Britain, it was written by a soldier who is supposed to represent

manliness, heroism and ‘combat Gnosticism’. It is therefore more difficult for critics to designate *Testament of Youth* as the sentimental account of a mere woman, because Leighton, the soldier, is introduced as the more sentimental of the two. Brittain thus challenges accepted gender roles. Brittain continually tries to make the autobiography as unsentimental as possible to create the idea that her account is objective. In that respect, the poem has been well chosen to introduce this chapter, as Brittain herself explains why she emphasizes not the development of her love for Roland, but her examinations:

Any reader who has succeeded in following up to this point my warfare against Buxton young-ladyhood will probably feel that I have given far too much time and space to the adolescent subject of examinations. Readers, as almost all my editors have informed me at one time or another, are apt to remain quite untouched by any topic that is not well saturated with ‘human interest’ (i.e. love-affairs, sex crises and maternal self-indulgences [...]).⁸¹

She further notes that including more of these instances of “human interest” would not objectively represent what she experienced at that time, even though throughout the chapter she does describe some instances of her developing relationship with Leighton. In this respect, she challenges existing gender roles by using his poem to reflect the affective side of that period, whereas she herself was trying to escape provincialism in order to enter the world of intellectualism⁸², which was unusual for women at the time. The way in which she comments on this editorial choice also stands out: instead of telling what happened as an omniscient and often criticising narrator, as she often does throughout the memoir, she here discusses the creation of the work. This is all the more prominent because the reading flow is broken by the introduction of this paragraph at the beginning of a new section within the chapter, which highlights its significance. This is an example of how Brittain focusses on what she personally considers important to tell her story. According to Badenhausen this sustains her authority claim because of the association between the personal and truthfulness, although he does not give any examples himself.⁸³

However, the chapter is also undoubtedly a social critique on the “Buxton Young-ladyhood”, that Brittain said she was struggling against in the aforementioned citation. Specifically the ideal of the Victorian – i.e. subordinate and passive – woman is criticized and this critique is also echoed by the poem of self-proclaimed feminist Roland Leighton, who questions what else she could have done in parentheses (l. 6).⁸⁴ In what follows I will argue that

⁸¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 54.

⁸² Mellow, “Reflections on Feminism and Pacifism in the novels of Vera Brittain,” 216.

⁸³ Badenhausen, “Mourning through Memoir,” 442.

⁸⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 66.

it is not just the poem and the chapter that are interacting intertextually, but that both show similarities to a poem by the Victorian poet Augusta Webster, who is known for her dramatic monologues, that expose wrongs in society concerning gender roles.

The poem which has plausibly influenced this chapter is Webster's "The Happiest Girl in the World".⁸⁵ Although there is no proof that Brittain had read Webster's work, there are enough similarities between Brittain's chapter and "The Happiest Girl in the World" to make a comparison valuable in showing how both women indicate wrongs in society. This dramatic monologue is narrated by a girl, who has agreed to marry her suitor, but does not feel ready to do so yet at the beginning of the poem. Throughout the rest of the poem she explores the traditional gender roles for a woman, as a wife and mother. In the end, she accepts her fate and complies with the Victorian ideal of the "waiting woman", who always waits for and waits on her husband. She therefore becomes "the prisoned seed that never more shall float" (l. 175). The reason I believe there are interdiscursive links between Brittain's chapter and "The Happiest Girl in the World" is twofold: not only is the passive and subordinate role women were supposed to assume criticised in both Webster's poem and "Provincial Young-Ladyhood", but the former also incorporates a passage which is close in its description to Brittain's depiction of the scene at the rose garden, as I will show further on.

Webster's "The Happiest Girl in the World" has been read as a critique on the concept of the "waiting woman", a gender role Victorian women were expected to take up. In the poem the narrator goes from questioning whether she is ready to marry and submit herself to her admirer to eventually doing so. Webster thus shows that a girl, probably too young to marry ("and I have not yet learned to know myself" (l. 14)), is forced into this role by society's expectations. Conversely, Brittain, even though she lived in a very similar environment, resists to adhere to quintessential gender roles by indicating that the intellectual side of her past life was more important than the courtship. Her critique is that a man's greatest pleasures, meaning marriage and fatherhood, are given to him by women, yet according to Brittain, men are taught to show that "contempt for the female sex [is ...] a necessary part of their educational equipment".⁸⁶ This critique is a thematic link between the poem and the chapter.

Interdiscursively the following passage from "Provincial Young-Ladyhood" also corresponds with "The Happiest Girl in the World":

I remember to-day how perfectly my dress - a frilled pink ninon with a tiny pattern, worn beneath a rose-trimmed lace hat - seemed to have been made for our chosen corner

⁸⁵ Appendix 2

⁸⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 69.

of the garden, where roses with velvet petals softly shading from orange through pink to crimson foamed exuberantly over the lattice-work of an old wooden trellis. But even if I had forgotten, I should still have Roland's verses, 'In the Rose-Garden', to renew the fading colors of a far-away dream.⁸⁷

The passage can be linked to Webster's poem in various ways. Firstly the semantic discourse directly corresponds with that of the 'Happiest Girl'. When trying to pinpoint when she first fell in love with her future husband, the girl articulates the following:

June rosebuds stir and open stealthily,
And every new blown rose is a surprise;
Still we can date the day when one unclosed:
But how can I tell when my love began? (ll. 39-42).

The rose imagery, which occurs prominently both in Leighton's poem and in Brittain's account of the scene, is therefore also used by Webster as a metaphor for flowering love. But as flower imagery in poetry is a long existing tradition, more correspondences are needed to indicate the similarities between "The Happiest Girl in the World" and Brittain's work. The choosing of the dress, elaborately described by Brittain, is another parallel to Webster's poem, in which the girl becomes very self-conscious about her fashion choices in order to leave an impression on the man, who is courting her. On the one hand she explains how perfectly her dress fit the surroundings:

For why was it I knew that he would watch,
And all the while thought in my silly head,
As I advanced demurely, it was well
I had on the pale dress with sweeping folds
Which took the light and shadow tenderly,
And that the sunlights touched my hair and cheek,
Because he'd note it and care for it? (ll. 68-74).

This is very similar to Brittain's declaration that her dress seemed perfect for the chosen corner of the garden at Uppingham she and Leighton chose. She further mentions Leighton's description of the scene in "In the Rose-Garden" and this male gaze is also explored by Webster:

[...] he says he stood
And saw me come along the coppice walk
Beneath the green and the sparkling arch of boughs,
And, while he watched the yellow lights that played
With the dim flickering shadows of the leaves
Over my yellow hair and soft pale dress,
Flitting across me as I flitted through,
He whispered inly, in so many words,
"I see my wife; this is my wife who comes,

⁸⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 71.

And seems to bear the sunlight on with her” (ll. 56-65). Similarly Leighton in his second stanza describes how a girl steps from shadows into the sun in an almost idyllic scene (ll. 5-8). Both the description of the dress and the male gaze tell us about the social structures of the pre-war era and are therefore important for this chapter because they indicate gender roles that partially shattered during the war.

Secondly Brittain uses a poetic language to describe the scene, particularly the roses: the depiction consists of one long flowing sentence, instead of the expected regular full-stops in prose. Moreover, the flowing of the sentence, and therefore its poetic quality, is enhanced by the repetition of sounds, which is a central characteristic of poetry. More specifically the assonance of /s/ among other soft vowels, such as fricatives “[...] roses with velvet petals softly shading [...]”⁸⁸ contributes to this flow. The function of this use of language is related to Mukarovsky’s principle of ‘aesthetic foregrounding’: “literary language use deviates from ordinary language use, the purpose of which is aesthetic foregrounding”.⁸⁹ In other words, the language is purposely different from every-day language to foreground it. Therefore it is plausible that Brittain aesthetically foregrounds this specific passage in order to create a link with someone who criticised male dominance.

Even though Brittain does not directly refer to the title “The Happiest Girl in the World” or to Augusta Webster, all these parallels link the poem and the chapter and thus hint that Brittain here categorises herself as one of those ‘happiest girls’, who are courted by a man with a possible marriage in the future. At the end of the poem the happiest girl decides that she will assume all quintessential gender characteristics for women and become a ‘waiting woman’, whereas Brittain defies gender roles by going to Somerville, but the cores similarly portray a world where the exterior and the self in society are crucial: “Oh vain and idle poor girl’s heart of mine, | content with that coquettish mean content!” (“Happiest Girl” ll. 75-76). Brittain does refer indirectly to her own title as she calls this period “the golden hours of youth – that period of life when every sorrow seems permanent, and every set-back insuperable”.⁹⁰ These golden hours are also described by Webster and would soon be over for Brittain, as the next chapter demonstrates.

The second chapter establishes Brittain’s authority to write on the War by combining the introduction of a soldier as a more sentimental character and presenting herself as defying gender assumptions through her intellectualism. Gender inequality will be an important topic

⁸⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 71.

⁸⁹ Stef Slembrouck, “Poetry I,” (Lecture, Ghent University, Belgium, September 22, 2015).

⁹⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 50.

through *Testament of Youth*, as by pointing the unjustified prejudices against women in general, Brittain counters the idea that women could not write about the War because of these prejudices, i.e. that all of them were ignorant and complacent. However, when Brittain is finally allowed into Oxford, she faces yet another breach between herself and men: Roland describes her life as “a secluded life of scholastic vegetation” (84) in his letters. He further writes that “It would seem a somewhat cowardly shirking of my obvious duty ... I feel that I am meant to take an active part in this War”.⁹¹ Brittain thus uses quotation by a person, who had previously been described as a feminist, to indicate the effect of war on gender tradition: men were expected to be ‘active’, whereas women were again pushed into the box of ‘passivity’, characterized by “cold theorising”, which makes her critique and her authority claim even stronger.⁹²

⁹¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 85.

⁹² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 84.

5.2.1.3 “Oxford versus War” and “August 1914”

“August 1914”

God said: ‘Men have forgotten Me;
The souls that sleep shall wake again,
And blinded eyes be taught to see.’

So, since redemption comes through pain,
He smote the earth with chastening rod,
And brought destruction’s lurid reign;

But where His desolation trod,
The people in their agony
Despairing cried: ‘There is no God!’”

The third chapter of the first part is titled “Oxford versus War” and describes Brittain’s experiences from the second half of 1914 until early 1915, which corresponds with the period she visited Oxford. The chapter opens with another poem by Brittain herself, written in 1914: “August 1914”. Within the chapter Brittain takes up the themes of Oxford and War, which link the title, the introductory poem and the chapter’s content.

The poem’s nine lines are divided into three three-line stanzas with the rhyme scheme: a b a b c b c a c, i.e. alternating rhyme. The iambic tetrameter is regular throughout the poem, apart from the very first line, which starts off with a trochaic substitution to emphasize the word “God”. Iambs are usually used in encomiastic poetry because they are rising feet, but in this case they are used mockingly in order to describe the catastrophe of war. In the previous chapters, the intellectual Brittain distinguished herself from the archetypal pre-war Victorian woman, concerned with superficialities and finding a partner. “August 1914” extends this contrast between Brittain and women to a contrast between the former and all civilians, who complacently welcomed the war against Germany with cheers. This sense of desperation is generated by the fact that the poem tries to find a reason for the outbreak of war and ultimately designates God as the instigator. The first stanza explores a plausible cause for the War: God provoked the War, because humans had lost faith in him, which was a concern for Brittain’s contemporaries after the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century. The second stanza reveals the method God will use to make Man remember him: “He smote the earth with chastening rod, | and brought destruction’s lurid reign;” (ll. 5-6). The result, which is described in the third stanza, is even more people losing their faith due to the suffering that comes with War.

If the poems of the previous chapters answered to Badenhausen's statement that all introductory poems attempt to present us with an un-traumatised version of Brittain and that she seeks "to recover an idealised, prewar, pastoral moment"⁹³ in them, then this is the first poem of many to counter his beliefs. In his article he expresses the idea that the chapters serve to counter the idealism of the poems. However "Oxford versus War" and "August 1914" will prove to be equally unpastoral, as in a pastoral world, there is no suffering.

After reading this poem, which deals with serious religious questions, the first line of the chapter is a shocking contrast, because it takes the reader back to Brittain's reality in those days: "My diary for August 3rd 1914, contains a most incongruous mixture of war and tennis".⁹⁴ This indicates that even though the poem was titled "August 1914" when the war had just started Brittain did not give much thought to what she read about the war in the press because it all seemed "too incredible to be taken quite seriously".⁹⁵

In that same month Brittain's attitude towards the war shifts slightly when she sees her Brother Edward in uniform for "schoolboy manoeuvres".⁹⁶ She says she then realised the impact of the war and that it might affect them personally⁹⁷, however it does not yet create the struggle the title suggests and neither does it raise the questions she asks in "August 1914". When she some time later reads a mobilisation order at the Town Hall, she realises the war, previously a public affair, is starting to interfere with the personal lives of the English population. Throughout *Testament of Youth* Brittain often exemplifies her sentiments towards events by means of manifest intertextuality: she quotes another author to justify her emotions and opinions. To illustrate the restlessness mobilisation caused her, she inserts a passage from *Daniel Deronda* on the effects of war, which includes the following sentence: "Then it is that the submission of the soul to the Highest is tested [...]".⁹⁸ The effect on the reader is twofold: firstly by quoting different authors Brittain manifests her own intellectualism, rendering her a more trustworthy unsentimental writer, and secondly the quotations underpin the universality of her reactions, which corresponds to her aim of writing the testament of a whole generation, instead of solely her own life story. The line from *Daniel Deronda* about God links back to the poem at the beginning of the chapter, which also viewed war as inflicted by God in order to test humanity's faith. Both texts are therefore intertextually and interdiscursively linked to clarify

⁹³ Badenhausen, "Mourning through Memoir," 439.

⁹⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 75.

⁹⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 75.

⁹⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 76.

⁹⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 77.

⁹⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 79.

Brittain's thoughts. Yet at the end of the first section she is back at Oxford, instead of actively engaging in the war, and writes in her diary how she wished "to find this terrible war the dream it seems to me to be!", while she tries to knit for soldiers.⁹⁹ In other words, even though the War is nearing, it does not affect her directly yet.

As mentioned, the second stanza of "August 1914" explores the destruction of the world. When Brittain and Edward encounter a fairy ring and she does not want to tell Edward that she wished for Roland and herself to become lovers, she quotes herself: "I'll tell you if you ask me again in five years' time, for by then the wish will have come true or be about to come true, or it will never come true at all".¹⁰⁰ The sense of despair, which the poem introduced, is taken up again in this passage, because the reader already knows Leighton will die during the war and accordingly, the wish will never come true.

Even after the First Battle of Ypres and the Siege of Antwerp Brittain remembers thinking that the war could never really affect her personally, whereas school did.¹⁰¹ So even though she has been contemplating the war since the beginning of the chapter, the war, which according to the poem would touch all mankind, has not yet had a major influence on her or caused her much distress, but at the end of that same section it again comes closer in the form of a fellow student who had a brother at the Front.¹⁰² As the title suggests, this then contrasts again with the following section, which entirely deals with Oxford, shopping and her developing relationship with Leighton. This relationship with Leighton seems to be the pivotal point in the chapter as it introduces the religious aspect of the poem: "I wonder if I shall have found you only to lose you again, or if Time will spare us [...]. God knows, and will answer"¹⁰³, she wrote in her 1914 diary. Though the matter here is more personal than in the poem, it reiterates the idea that God decides the outcome of War; their fates are in his hands.

After spending some time with Leighton around New Year, Brittain mentions a hymn she supposedly heard in Church: Cowper's "God moves in a mysterious way". Almost too coincidental, this hymn fits Brittain's 1914 poem, which is to explicate her feelings about the outbreak of war, incorporates the following stanza:

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,

⁹⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 81.

¹⁰⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 84.

¹⁰¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 90.

¹⁰² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 91.

¹⁰³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 94.

And He will make it plain.¹⁰⁴

By mentioning the hymn in this chapter, it both complements and disagrees with Brittain's poem, recreating the ongoing discussion about the role of God in such a catastrophe.

Gradually the War starts to take up a more prominent role in the chapter and in Brittain's life. By the spring of 1915, for example, recruiting posters were inescapable in Oxford and the rest of England. To exemplify the effect of these propagandist efforts, Brittain includes a poster that aims to convince Englishmen to save Belgium. From this point onwards Oxford and War are strongly interwoven and again linked to the introductory poem because "dons and clerics were still doing their best to justify the War and turn it into England's Holy Crusade".¹⁰⁵ This statement again incorporates the religious rhetoric and again labels religion as a possible cause of the conflict: a war for God. Brittain even quotes a letter to Leighton, who has gone to the Front, in which she cited a sermon in Church, which dictated that "the call of our country is the call of God".¹⁰⁶

Within this chapter the War develops from being remote to Brittain's immediate environment to eventually intermingling her private life with public affairs. The chapter is introduced by a poem on God's part in the war; however, throughout the rest of the chapter, she not only explores the potential religious reasons behind the war, but also discusses how the Church helped to stimulate the War. As indicated Brittain uses manifest intertextuality to either present her reader with quotations that justify her sentiments and universalise them or to showcase how the War was influencing non-military domains, such as religion to show that the experience of War was not limited to the trenches, but also affected everyday life. Both grant her authority to speak on the war because they indicate her knowledge about the impending War.

¹⁰⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 99.

¹⁰⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 106.

¹⁰⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 106.

5.2.1.4 “Learning versus Life” and “Villanelle”

“Villanelle”

Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you oversea.
(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red,
For they grew around his head;
It is strange they should be blue.)

Violets from Plug Street Wood –
Think what they have meant to me –
Life and Hope and Love and You
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day;
Sweetest, it was better so.)

Violets from oversea,
To your dear, far, forgetting land
These I send in memory,
Knowing You will understand.

So far Brittain is alternating her own poems with those of Leighton: similarly to the second chapter, the fourth chapter “Learning versus Life” is introduced by one of the latter’s poems. If the second chapter mainly focused on the role of the Victorian woman and the third on the role of religion in times of War, then this fourth chapter chiefly uses intertextuality to depict the role of the press and rumours. Even though, in comparison to the previous chapters, the fourth is notably longer, Brittain succeeds in maintaining a high amount of links between chapter title, chapter content and the introductory poem “Villanelle” through intertextual references.

Formally “Villanelle”, which was written by Leighton in April 1915, is more irregular than the previously included poems. It consists of three stanzas, the first of which consists of six lines, the second of seven lines and the final stanza of four lines. Despite the divergent stanza forms, sounds are occasionally repeated at the end of a line, creating the following rhyme scheme: a b c d d c / a b c e f f e / b g b g. Through the combination of regular full rhyme with diverse stanzas the poem formally conveys uneasiness because it is not perfectly harmonic. This uneasiness is mirrored by the content: the lyrical I talks to his loved one about violets, that he sends oversea to her after encountering them in Belgium: “Violets from Plug Street Wood, | Sweet, I send you oversea” (ll. 1-2). After these first two lines, follow four between parentheses, in which the lyrical I contrasts the blue of the violets with the red blood of the soldier whose head the violets grew around. At the beginning of the second stanza the lyrical I asks his partner

to think what the flowers must have meant to him and answers this question himself with “Life and Hope and Love and You” (l. 9). The capitalisation of these concepts renders them more idealised and abstract. The sense that these words are mere abstractions is enhanced by the following lines, which are again between parentheses, because they express everything but idealised abstract concepts. Instead they disclose that the dead soldier of the previous stanza was mangled and looked horrific and that the violets hid a little of that horror. The last stanza does not incorporate any lines between brackets. The speaker directly expresses his wish for his loved one to understand the true meaning of the violets, even though she lives in a country that is “forgetting” (l. 15).

“Villanelle” can be interpreted as a critique on the Defence of the Realm Act and censorship on letters as a result thereof, because that act dictated that “the spread of false reports or reports likely to cause disaffection to His Majesty” had to be prevented.¹⁰⁷ Disaffection would have been caused by expressing criticism on the conduct of the War and its atrocities. Whereas the lines that are not between brackets show an idealised scene of plucked violets, the ones that are in brackets illustrate the harsher reality of the context of the plucking. Throughout “Learning versus Life” Brittain will explore various ways in which the truth can be hidden in literature, how false reports fuelled public opinion and, as the poem is written in the form of a letter, she also illustrates the significance of letter writing.

The beginning of the chapter deals with various ways in which the press manipulated the mind of Brittain and her contemporaries and how rumours were a vital part of life at the Home Front as well as letter communication with the front. In the fifth paragraph of the chapter, shortly after “Villanelle”, Brittain makes the following statement about the battle at Neuve Chapelle: “As usual the Press had given no hint of that tragedy’s dimensions, and it was only through the long casualty lists, and the persistent demoralising rumour[s . . .], that the world was gradually coming to realise something of what the engagement had been”.¹⁰⁸ This is an explicit example of how the Press manipulated civilians at the Home Front to believe that all was well at the Front, an immediate result of the Defence of the Realm Act.

To kill time Brittain writes essays on war topics such as ‘war-babies’, in which she combines what she has read in various newspapers. However, the included diary extracts about these essays again show the influence of the Press on civilian’s knowledge of the war. Brittain notes that her personal ideas were also very much influenced by her Victorian upbringing or

¹⁰⁷ National Archives, “Defence of the Realm Act,”

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/first_world_war/p_defence.htm.

¹⁰⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 115.

“ancestral morality”.¹⁰⁹ The superficial information of the Press is emphasized even more when Brittain as the narrator comments on these writings with a lot of sarcasm.

The poem also raises the question of who shares the real knowledge of the war. In the last line “Knowing You will understand” (l. 17) the word “you” is emphasised because it appears right before the caesura and because it is capitalised. “You” could be the younger generation, when combined with Brittain’s directly quoted diary passage on how the War mainly affects the younger generation and on how older values are no longer valid. In this sense the younger generation “understands” the lines between brackets in “Villanelle”, whereas the older would only read the superficial “Life and Hope and Love and You” (l. 9). Brittain expresses that an important part of the war was letter writing: they continuously felt the “wearing anxiety of waiting for letters which for [Brittain] was to last, with only brief intervals, for more than three years, and which, [...] made all non-combatants feel more distracted than anything else in the War”.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Leighton’s poem formally mimics a letter, which has been sent across the sea to the Home Front.

Even though Leighton seems certain in his poem that Brittain will understand, just before she mentions receiving the poem from Leighton, Brittain ponders over “the possibility of a permanent impediment to understanding”.¹¹¹ In a subsequent diary extract she elaborates that the cause of the impediment may be Leighton’s experiences at the front.

The lies of war, explored in the poem, continue to be described right after Brittain reminds her readers of the “Villanelle”. One instance deals with the war myth that all Englishmen were good and all Germans were bad. To counter this Brittain paraphrases a letter by Leighton, in which he describes a grave made by Germans with the inscription “Here lie five brave English officers”.¹¹²

After these concepts of lies, rumours and the Press have been introduced, the chapter shifts to focus more on the content promised by the title: a struggle between ‘learning’ and ‘life’. The title was constructed in the same way as that of the third chapter, but there’s much less of a gradual intermingling here. As soon as Brittain has to go back for another semester at Somerville, she indicates by various diary extracts that ‘life’ in the sense of experience already has the upper hand: “I would have given anything not to have had to come back,’ I confessed in my diary. ‘If it had not been for P. Mods. I could have started nursing at once’”.¹¹³ And on

¹⁰⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 120.

¹¹⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 121.

¹¹¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 122.

¹¹² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 123.

¹¹³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 124.

that same page she also notes that: “I should still have been anxious to get as far as I could from intellect and its torment; I longed intensely for hard physical labour which would give me discomfort to endure and weariness to put mental speculation to sleep”. It is not long after writing this, that she passes her P. Mods. and is able to start nursing. Still, she does use this last interval at Oxford to introduce a further function of the Press: comic relief for people at the Home Front. With everything going on, a male journalist still found the time to write a mock-poem about women students moving into halls previously allocated to male students at Oxford.¹¹⁴ To indicate the comic relief may be Brittain’s only reason for incorporating this passage, as the anecdote has nothing in common with the rest of Brittain’s topic matter. A link with the poem about writing, censorship and, indirectly, the Press which caused the “forgetting” of the land (l. 15), is therefore a logical explanation for this anomaly.

What this chapter so far has indicated, is that Brittain chooses a topic, which she introduces by means of a poem and that she then delves into its different aspects within the chapter, which would be hard to realise for a reader that is not looking out for more connections to the poem than the mere mentioning of the violets. It thus shows Brittain’s craftsmanship and intricate use of intertextually to construct her text. Brittain continues to focus on the importance of letters and the ways in which literature and the press can work in a society touched by war.

Within this society, a life of mere academic ‘learning’ seems to become unbearable for Brittain, who longs to be able to understand a little of what Leighton is going through as he asks of her in last line of “Villanelle”. Her diary records again exemplify how much she was irritated by her forced passivity, in which she was moreover reprimanded for little faults that did not matter to her anymore: “‘for I who know and think only of the one big thing in my life to be corrected on account of something small and unimportant by someone who does not know!’”¹¹⁵ However, life at the Home Front seems to be quite full of people who “don’t know”. The cause of the not-knowing are constructed rumours. Brittain further exemplifies this by introducing the character of her uncle, who has an important function at the National Provincial Bank of Bishopsgate, and therefore had more insight into the situation.¹¹⁶ Brittain uses indirect speech combined with phrases in direct quotation to represent as truthfully as possible the false positivity he spread. However, as narrator she then comments on the function of these rumours: “They sound ludicrous enough now, these rumours, these optimisms, these assurances, to us who still wonder why, in spite of all our incompetence, we managed to ‘win’ the War. But at

¹¹⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 127.

¹¹⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 134.

¹¹⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 140.

the time they helped us to live. I cannot, indeed, imagine how long we should have succeeded in living without them".¹¹⁷ The land of Leighton's "Villanelle" could thus also be "forgetting" because it is continually being misled. This inaccurate conveying of what was happening by both the Press and the government is something also treated by Trudi Tate¹¹⁸, who, nevertheless, fails to notice that the misleading information could also have a positive effect, as Brittain does. The latter consequently proves the importance of looking at trends in literature at the Home Front, because it is obviously less straightforward than Tate's evaluation.

Subsequently, the pivotal point in the part and chapter occurs: Brittain leaves Oxford to nurse and thus 'Life' takes over from 'Learning' in the academic sense: "It was one's personality that counted, and that could be better nourished sometimes in active life than in halls of learning. It was a point of view that I was ready most enthusiastically to endorse. Learning, for the moment, had certainly been pushed into the background by life".¹¹⁹ After this reference to the title of the chapter, the nature of intertextual references and references to the poem shifts. Whereas previously Brittain would constantly be using direct quotation from people, Press, literature, her diary, etc., the extent to which she uses these references significantly lessens. A possible explanation is that, because she is now recounting her own experiences as a nurse, she does not feel as if she has to prove as much to the audience: we have to accept that things happened the way she tells them. Secondly, whereas the first part of the chapter mainly linked to the poem by focussing on the contrast between the lines in brackets and the rest of the poem, the second half of the chapter focusses on letter writing. Letter writing, sending and receiving had been mentioned as being important in the first part, but as Brittain now leaves the academic world, it becomes almost the sole instance of intertextuality in the second part of this chapter, apart from some quotations from her own diary or smaller instances of direct speech to characterise certain persona.

The rest of the chapter, dominated by letter communication, shows that Brittain mainly relies on Leighton's letters for information and no longer writes as extensively about rumours and the Press as she did before, because she is now able to compare her own situation better to that of Leighton and therefore understands the way of War better because of her physical labour. She uses her diary to prove her changed relation to letters, after she started nursing: whereas as a mere civilian, waiting for letters was what mattered in her life, nursing allows her to feel closer to the front and "diverted [her] mind from the letter that had not come or the telegram

¹¹⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 140.

¹¹⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 162.

¹¹⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 141.

that might be coming".¹²⁰ She then compares her reaction to the first dead person she sees to that of Leighton, who had previously sent her his reaction in a letter and says that their reactions were very similar, thus showing through his letters that a nurse's account can be just as realistic and that she has just as much authority to write on certain horrors of War. This is an example of Albrinck's argument that Brittain "gains authority in allying herself with Roland".¹²¹ She thus breaks with the idea of combat Gnosticism: a belief that soldiers shared some kind of hidden knowledge others did not. In other words, she does understand, as the Leighton's poem presupposed and therefore the parts of the poem between brackets do not have to be left out.

Although this chapter was significantly longer, Brittain again succeeds in introducing a topic through a poem: writing during the First World War. The poem gives Leighton's point of view on letter writing and sending, including censorship and the questions whether people at the Home Front are forgetting the situation at the front and whether they could understand his situation. Brittain compares this to what literature in the broadest sense means to people at the Home Front, which can be compared to what Leighton wrote in his poem, as she, for example, explains why people forget or why they would not understand. A shift in the role of literature is also noticeable after she starts nursing: the press becomes less important and she starts to rely more on her own accounts and letters. As a result thereof, she gives less intertextual evidence than before, and when she does them, she compares her own thoughts with those of Leighton, becoming more of an authority herself.

¹²⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 150.

¹²¹ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 183.

5.2.1.5 “Camberwell versus Death” and “Triolet”

“Triolet”

There’s a sob on the sea
And the Old Year is dying.
Borne on night wings to me
There’s a sob on the sea,
And for what could not be
The great world-heart is sighing.
There’s a sob on the sea
And the Old Year is dying.

Roland Leighton’s 1913 poem “Triolet” introduces the final chapter of the first part of *Testament of Youth*. It is a short poem of only eight lines for a comparatively short chapter. The metre is irregular because the length of the lines varies. Line 1 (“There’s a sob on the sea”) is reiterated in lines 4 and 7, and line 2 (“And the Old Year is dying”) is repeated in the eighth line. These repetitions in such a short poem mean that those lines are emphasised more strongly and altogether, they perfectly summarise what the narrator tries to convey: something is ending. Leighton wrote “Triolet” in 1913, so Brittain is re-contextualising the poem by using it to sketch her experiences from late 1915. Fundamental are the words “is dying”, because they are written in the present continuous instead of in the past tense. This means that the “dying” is still going on and not a concluded event as we would expect with death. The emphasis is therefore on the melancholy that the dying of the “Old Year” is bringing with it.

The chapter itself consists of two major themes that both relate to “Triolet” in a different way. First of all there are Brittain’s own new living conditions as a nurse, which differ from the previous chapters since she now fully “turned [her] back for ever upon [her] provincial-ladyhood”.¹²² In the first section, Brittain primarily focusses on what being moved to a Hospital in London meant for her: the inadequacy of the hostel and the hardship of the work. She defends her choice break with her past to her parents in a letter: “[...] I should never respect myself again if I allowed a few slight physical hardships to make me give up what is the finest work any girl can do now. [...] not being a man and able to go to the front, I wanted to do the next best thing”.¹²³ This change is the beginning of Brittain’s “the Old Year is dying”, however the sadness, that the poem expresses, has not reached her yet.

Leighton is reintroduced in the second section and Brittain uses letters to compare her own ordeals with his. The following passage from their “epistolary quarrel” shows how much

¹²² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 180.

¹²³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 189.

the possibility of change of personality worried Brittain. She writes to Leighton: "I wonder how much really all you have seen and done has changed you. Personally, after seeing some of the dreadful things I have to see here, I feel I shall never be the same person again, and wonder if, when the War does end, I shall have forgotten how to laugh".¹²⁴ In his reply, Leighton believes he has changed more profoundly than Brittain has. Leighton's poem at the beginning of the chapter therefore relates more to Leighton's change than Brittain's, as later in the chapter she later also realises that her change has not been as complete as that of Roland. Her old life may be dying, but Leighton is further along the way, as the mix of harsh and warm letters prove. Brittain clarifies

that only a process of complete adaptation, blotting out tastes and talents and even memories, made life sufferable for someone face to face with war at its worst. I was not to discover for another year how completely the War possessed one's personality the moment that one crossed the sea, making England and all the uninitiated marooned within its narrow shores seem more remote and insignificant.¹²⁵

Similarly to Leighton's poem, in this passage the crossing of the sea plays an important part in the dying of one's personality. So Brittain expresses the idea that her becoming more of an automaton has not occurred yet, because she has not left England yet. In the previous chapter I gave an example of how Brittain gained authority by finding similarities between Leighton and herself, according to Albrinck.¹²⁶ I agree with this to a certain extent, however, the letters, Brittain includes, indicate that they were not always allies and often disagreed. It is not allying herself, but being able to recreate a dialogue, which allows her to compare and comment on both sides of the War. This is her most important source for authority in this chapter.

If the fear of change is the first focus of the chapter, then secondly the chapter focusses on the love relationship between Brittain and Leighton and the possibility of the latter getting leave in anticipation of his death at the end of the chapter, which is also the close of a time period, as the poem indicated. At first Brittain hopes Leighton will end up in her hospital ward so she can take care for him.¹²⁷ Throughout the chapter there is a lot of intertextuality in the form of letter communication between Brittain and Leighton, in which they both fight and express their love for one another. Near the end of the chapter there is a climax in which Brittain even dreams about marrying and having his baby, all in anticipation of the final page, where she answers the telephone on the day Leighton was supposed to come home, to hear he had been killed on the last night before he was due for leave. The whole chapter with the most

¹²⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 191.

¹²⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 192.

¹²⁶ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 283.

¹²⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 186.

prominent conversations between Brittain and Leighton thus far, leads up to this final conclusion; in this respect, the chapter is about the “is dying” of their time together. Therefore, in the end, Leighton’s 1913 poem proved to be prophetic, because it foretold “Borne on night wings to me | There’s a sob on the sea, | And for what could not be” (ll. 3-5), as sad news from over the sea reached Brittain early in the morning and thus ended “the Old Year” of their relationship. Notable is how she does not use any quotations, not from her diary, a letter to someone about it, nor from the phone call, the depiction of the scene is entirely construed by her memories.

5.2.2 Part II

Part II opens with a poem by the Scottish war poet May Wedderburn Cannan.¹²⁸ Wedderburn Cannan's story is similar to that of Brittain: she was also a young woman destined for Oxford, who joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment, when the possibility of war arose and as a result also served in France.¹²⁹

The poem Brittain includes is "When the Vision dies...", which was published in Wedderburn Cannan's 1919 volume *The Splendid Days*. The Scottish Poetry Library describes the poem as follows: "when the war had been won but so much had been lost. A friend called her poetry heart-breaking in its nakedness of loss".¹³⁰ Brittain probably included this particular poem for that reason: it expresses the idea that even when the war is over, the war against loneliness and loss goes on for the ones left. However, the poem also offers a consoling ending: "Though he comes no more at night he will kneel at your side | For comfort to dream with you" (ll. 7-8). In other words, the dead can live on in dreams of the living.

Brittain could have included one of her own poems about losing Leighton, but instead she chooses to let another VAD nurse speak about loss to indicate the universality of what they all went through. Thus she increases her authority to speak on the subject, because other people can avow the believability of her memoirs.

In part I, there was a shift from a normal childhood to an unhappy young adulthood, as the extract from Laura Gonzenbach's fairy tale indicated. In this chapter, following Wedderburn Cannan's poem, there will be a shift from "Know this is your War, in this loneliest hour you ride | Down the roads he knew" (ll. 5-6) to eventually accepting the loss and finding consolation in the penultimate part, before that, however, Brittain would have to suffer a few more losses.

¹²⁸ Appendix 3

¹²⁹ Scottish Poetry Library, "May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973)", <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poets/may-wedderburn-cannan>.

¹³⁰ Scottish Poetry Library, "May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973)".

5.2.2.1 “When the Vision Dies...” and “Perhaps... To R. A. L.”

“Perhaps... To R. A. L.”

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of You.

Perhaps the golden meadows at my feet
Will make the sunny hours of spring seem gay,
And I shall find the white May-blossoms sweet,
Though You have passed away.

Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer bright,
And crimson roses once again be fair,
And autumn harvest fields a rich delight,
Although You are not there.

But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of You
Was broken, long ago.

The title of the sixth chapter reiterates the poem that opened the second part of Brittain’s autobiography and thus recapitulates its contents. However only the first line is mentioned, and, incidentally, this chapter will be more about the loss than the consolation offered by Wedderburn Cannan’s poem.

After using Wedderburn Cannan’s poem as a title, Brittain gives her own response to Leighton’s death in a poem: “Perhaps... To R. A. L.”, which consists of sixteen lines, arranged in four quatrains, each of which is made up of three lines in iambic pentameter and one in iambic trimeter. The structure of the content is the opposite in that of Wedderburn Cannan’s poem: Brittain first expresses how she might one day be able to appreciate the beauty of the world again in the first three lines of the first three stanzas, for example “Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer bright, | And the crimson roses once again be fair” (ll. 9-10). The ever-important roses, which have been a symbol for Brittain’s and Leighton’s relationship since Leighton’s “In the Rose-Garden”, also make a reappearance. The fourth line in those first three stanzas contrasts with the first three lines, because it gives the reason why she cannot appreciate those things yet: “Although bereft of You” (l. 4). In the last stanza she says that other joys may come back to her, but the greatest joy will not return because she has lost her loved one. This

is true for the chapter as well: throughout it Brittain tries to figure out what life in a world without Leighton means, but she does not succeed in learning to appreciate life yet.

Briefly after Leighton's death, when she has already started nursing at Camberwell again, Brittain recalls a line from a poem by Rupert Brooke, whilst trying to enjoy the beauty of nature:

It is Wednesday, and I am walking up the Brixton Road on a mild, fresh morning of early spring. Half-consciously I am repeating a line from Rupert Brooke: 'The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying...'. For a moment I have become conscious of the old joy in rain-washed skies and scuttling, fleecy clouds, when suddenly I remember – Roland is dead and I am not keeping faith with him; it is mean and cruel, even for a second, to feel glad to be alive.¹³¹

This contrasts with what she hopes for in her introductory poem "Perhaps... To R. A. L.": that spring will seem gay again (l. 6). The line she includes originally belongs to Brooke's war sonnet "Safety", which also suits the situation, because it talks about how soldiers will be safe in death. Brittain, however, is not ready to accept this yet, hence the anger that follows. It would take quite a while before she lets herself appreciate things again. This contrasts with what a colonel wrote to her after Leighton's burial, who wrote that "the sun came out and shone brilliantly";¹³² apart from probably having buried quite a few men already, emotional distance allows him to go on with his life directly after the funeral, whereas Brittain struggles with appreciating the beauty of everyday life.

As this chapter deals with how to handle loss, in what follows the act of letter writing again becomes crucial. In the previous passage I explained Brittain found it hard to appreciate nature's beauty after Leighton's death. The letters again suggest a link between nature and coming to terms with loss¹³³. In a letter, Brittain's mother offers a piece of literature as another way of consolation. Brittain includes the specific passage in her work, which dictates that the deceased is with God now and that they will be reunited after death.¹³⁴ Brittain then contrasts this with an extract from Bertrand Russell. This extract ruthlessly asserts that "all our affections are at the mercy of death, which may strike down those whom we love at any moment; it is therefore necessary that our lives should not have that narrow intensity which puts the whole meaning and purpose of our life at the mercy of an accident".¹³⁵ Brittain comments that if Russell's text had already been written back then, she would have chosen his to comfort her.

¹³¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 215.

¹³² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 217.

¹³³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 221.

¹³⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 222.

¹³⁵ Bertrand Russell, quoted in Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 223.

Furthermore, the extract is indeed quite similar to her poem “Perhaps... To R. A. L.” in its content matter, meaning that you have to go on and live your life, even after someone you care about has passed.

Before Brittain starts to come to terms with the loss of Leighton, there is another instance in which loss and nature intertwine: about one month after Leighton has died, early spring has already arrived, however, instead of the gay “sunny hours of spring” from “Perhaps... To R. A. L.”, Brittain here describes how she hates everything about it:

[...] when a red sunset turned the puddles on the road into gleaming pools of blood, and a new horror of mud and death darkened my mind with its dreadful obsession. Roland [...] was now part of the corrupt clay into which war had transformed the fertile soil of France; he would never again know the smell of a wet evening in early spring.¹³⁶

This direct quotation of her thoughts at the time indicates how all-consuming the loss was and that the letters had not brought much consolation for it. Instead of admiring its beauty, she links nature to the War and what it has meant for Leighton in the end.

Even though Leighton has died and is therefore no longer part of the letter communication, he is not silenced. Brittain allows him enter the discussion on how to deal with losing someone by including a poem of his, “Hédauville”, which he wrote in November 1915, during their so-called ‘epistolary quarrel’. The poem consists of three stanzas, in which the narrator (assumedly Leighton) gives advice on what to do after he has died to his partner (Brittain). The first stanza expresses that after the bereavement, nature will be unchanged and is “waiting for you still” (l. 5). This continues in the second stanza, where the partner is to go out into nature again and is, by taking this step, able to meet someone else. The third stanza compares this “stranger” with the narrator and in the end decides that “you may not let him go” and “it will be better so” (l. 14, 16). Leighton wrote this during the quarrel, so inserting the poem here is an example of how Brittain re-contextualises poems to fit the topic she is discussing. Her “Perhaps... To R. A. L.” may very well be an answer to Leighton’s “Hédauville”, especially because of the title: in the poem she expresses that perhaps someday all he wrote in “Hédauville” may happen, but her heart has been broken. Badenhause argues that Brittain creates a communal dialogue by quoting other texts in an attempt, not as an attempt to be modernist, but to create “a sympathetic communal body of listeners”.¹³⁷ I disagree on the function of the intertextuality: in my opinion she tries to validate speaking on the subject by including other speakers, not listeners. Therefore, she allows Leighton to speak on his own

¹³⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 224-225.

¹³⁷ Badenhause, “Mourning through Memoir,” 424.

death, instead of solely expressing her own reaction. Listening is too passive: the letters and poems are allowed to speak and she responds, as in a proper dialogue.

After the inclusion of Leighton's opinion on the matter, or at least his opinion a month before he actually died, Brittain communicates more of her own responses to his death in her diary. She articulates how all she feels is hopelessness, until she is released from the Fever Hospital after a minor illness. During her stay at the hospital, she had been able to recover physically after not properly resting since she started nursing and by early May, this made her strong enough to face Leighton's death: "and all at once the impulse to put what I felt into verse – a new impulse which had recently begun both to fascinate and torment me – sprang up with overwhelming compulsion".¹³⁸ The poem she then wrote, also included entirely in *Testament of Youth*, is "May Morning".¹³⁹ It is similar in its ideology to "Perhaps... To R. A. L.", but there is a clearer division between the happy part, which is composed of the first four stanzas and describes the growing love of the previous May, and the sad part, consisting of three stanzas about May 1916. In the last stanza, however, she wonders whether she "ever shall recapture, once again, | The mood of that May Morning, long ago" (ll. 39-40). This speculation is answered by the poem, which she wrote a little later, but which was included as an introduction, instead of being included in the chapter itself: "Perhaps... To R. A. L." ends with the lines:

But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of You
Was broken, long ago (ll. 13-16).

Therefore, neither of Brittain's poems involves an insurmountable loss: instead they both include the good (nature or memories) and the bad (not being able to retrieve what she used to feel and the dreariness of losing someone). The inclusion of "Hédauville" and, especially, "May Morning", in combination with the introductory poem, show her progress in accepting Leighton's death; they show that she has come a long way from despising nature, because immediately after including "May Morning", Brittain says to be enjoying her "surroundings", which is the first time since she comments on nature in a positive way since Leighton has died.¹⁴⁰

"Perhaps... To R. A. L." is uncharacteristic, however, when compared to the poems that introduced the previous chapters. Whereas those poems fitted their respective chapters from beginning to end in various ways, here the slight hopeful note that the beauty of nature is to

¹³⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 240.

¹³⁹ Appendix 4

¹⁴⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 242.

offer in the future is replaced in the chapter by the next immediate threat, which is her brother Edward Brittain's being sent to the front to participate in the battle of the Somme. The dread thus continues and there is not even the slightest hint yet of a warless future, moreover, Brittain even writes a farewell to Edward: "I say it too because in your little note – in case of what may be – you say farewell. Adieu, then, if it must be".¹⁴¹ She further states that it is again poetry that keeps her going and gives an example by Rudyard Kipling. This particular poem, instead of linking to the future, is rather an idealist war poem about pain vanishing and thus for once, the inaugural poem and the chapter end of a different note.

¹⁴¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 247.

5.2.2.2 *“Tawny Island” and “We Shall Come no More”*

“We Shall Come no More”

So then we came to the Island,
Lissom and Young, with the radiant sun in our faces;
Anchored in long quiet lines the ships were waiting,
Giants asleep in the peace of the dark-blue harbour.
Ashore we leapt, to seek the magic adventure
Up the valley at noontide,
Where shimmering lay the fields of asphodel.

*O Captain of our Voyage,
What of the Dead?
Dead days, dead hopes, dead loves, dead dreams, dead sorrows –
O Captain of our Voyage,
Do the Dead walk again?*

To-day we look for the Island,
Older, a little tired, our confidence waning;
On the ocean bed the shattered ships lie crumbling
Where lost men’s bones gleam white in the shrouded silence.
The Island waits, but we shall never find it,
Nor see the dark-blue harbour
Where twilight falls on fields of asphodel.

“We Shall Come no More” was written by Brittain in 1932 and is therefore retrospectively commenting on the War. Its nineteen lines are divided into three stanzas, of which the first and the third consist of seven lines each, whereas the second one stands out by being only five lines and because they are printed in italics. Thematically, the poem draws upon Ancient Greek mythology to explore heroism and what happens after death. In the first stanza, the young are seeking adventure “where shimmering lay the fields of asphodel” (l. 7). This particular line indicates that they are not afraid of death, because according to the myths, if you lead a worthy and heroic life, you would end up in Elysium, from which your next adventure would start. This stanza can be compared to the pre-war ‘heroism in the abstract’.

The second stanza depicts the stage of war itself: it questions what really happens after death and addresses these questions to “Captain of our Voyage”. As in the war, this person is a vague instance, because people start wondering why they are fighting and who is making the choices and, especially, the mistakes that cost lives: God, the War Office, the government, etc.

The third stanza describes the aftermath, in which survivors try to be as hopeful as before the war, but a whole generation with its values, symbolised by the ships, are gone: “On the ocean bed the shattered ships lie crumbling | Where lost men’s bones gleam white in the

shrouded silence” (ll. 15-16). The poem ends by suggesting Elysium may still be there, but the survivors will most certainly never see it.

The poem and the way it is incorporated into the chapter is different from the previous cases, because Brittain indirectly, i.e. without actually mentioning the poem, clarifies its most literal meaning in the first section of the chapter, which she has not done up until this point and will not do again. On a first level the can be analysed as a contemplation about heroism and life after death in a mythological framework. However, the first section of the chapter introduces a second interpretation by linking it to Brittain’s experience on Malta. Presumably, the reason for her explanation could be that “We Shall Come no More” was written at the same time she was writing *Testament of Youth* and she therefore probably needed a poem to fit this chapter, but had to write one as she did not have a suitable option, hence the justification she gives for introducing the poem in this chapter. Even though the title of the poem is not mentioned in the first section, there are various lexical indications that she is indeed elaborating on its themes.

The first paragraph describes a similar evolution as can be seen in the poem’s three stanzas: firstly she mentions nostalgia, which is a feeling also present in the first stanza of the poem, when she describes the young going on an adventure. Then the pity of war is reiterated: “War was a tragedy and a vast stupidity, a waste of youth and of time; it betrayed my faith, mocked my love, and irremediably spoilt my career”.¹⁴² This passage corresponds with the second stanza, because “the Dead” cannot only be interpreted as the victims of war, but also as what the living have lost. The latter interpretation corresponds with the following verse from the poem: “Dead days, dead hopes, dead loves, dead dreams, dead sorrows” (l. 10). Especially as the paragraph ends with her saying that Malta’s beauty allowed her to start living again after Roland’s death, which answers the question “Do the Dead walk again?” (l. 12) in a certain way, but also can be linked to the third stanza, where the old indeed continue to live. Further she talks about Malta being a “shrine”: this ties it in with the mythology of the poem. The island is also “sun-filled” and filled with asphodel, as was the island of the poem. I have previously interpreted the last stanza as the loss of a heroic generation in search of glory through and after death. Brittain gives another reason, namely that even if she visits Malta again, it will not appear to her in the same way as it did because of the contrast with the bleakness of war.¹⁴³

At the end of the first section, Brittain yet again discusses the causes and effects of war:

The causes of war are always falsely represented; its honour is dishonest and its glory meretricious, but the challenge to spiritual endurance [...] remain[s] to allure those boys

¹⁴² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 263.

¹⁴³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 263.

and girls who have just reached the age when love and friendship and adventure call more persistently than at any later time. The glamour may be the mere delirium of fever, which as soon as war is over dies out and shows itself for the will-o'-the-wisp that it is, but while it lasts no emotion known to man seems as yet to have quite the compelling power of this enlarged vitality.¹⁴⁴

As in the first and the third stanza Brittain in this quotation describes what drove so many young people to join the war and that nothing is left when it ends. The second stanza is also reiterated, because the fate of the war generation is decided by the “Captain of our Voyage”, i.e. the authorities that sent them to War and therefore also “caused” it.

The rest of the chapter is constructed in a familiar way to the previous chapters: it describes her journey to Malta, her stay there and her coming back to England. However, in comparison to the other chapters it would be uncharacteristic if this was the only way in which the poem can be linked to the chapter, especially on such a superficial level: throughout the chapter both of the formerly indicated interpretations of the poem can be found; in other words, the chapter deals both with Brittain’s experience on Malta and with perceptions of death.

Different instances correspond with different stanzas; the second section, for example, opens with Betty and Brittain’s excitement of going to Malta, which she links to their being the youngest: as it are the young, who in her poem and her explanation thereof are excited to go on active service.¹⁴⁵ After they have begun their journey to Malta, the classical dimension of the poem is confirmed by Brittain comparing the shores and harbours of the Mediterranean with those of the Ancient Greeks, which can hardly be a coincidence. The idealisation continues after her arrival at Malta, which is depicted as “a waking dream of white buildings against a bright blue sky”.¹⁴⁶ This also brings to mind the idyllic descriptions in the first stanza of “We Shall Come no More”.

Not only is the landscape of this unattainable adventurous island described in the poem, but also the ideology of a generation. Brittain’s uncle serves as an example of how much Brittain’s contemporaries were influenced by heroic idealism. She demonstrates this by incorporating his letters, ergo again an example of manifest intertextuality. What worries him is that because of his job, which is important at the Home Front, he is not allowed to fight in the War and is ashamed because of it : “for even if I walked out of the bank and joined up, I should in all probability be fetched back at once, [...] but the net result is real misery and the contemplation of the future if one has to confess never to have fought at all is altogether

¹⁴⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 264.

¹⁴⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 264.

¹⁴⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 273.

impossible”.¹⁴⁷ What he describes, is the adventurous men and women of the poem, who seek the unknown and end up in Elysium after a glorious life. Brittain herself comments on this that the War has cost him his life, just as it had cost the life of many men at the front, however, in her uncle’s case he had faced humiliation instead of glory.¹⁴⁸

Up until this point, Brittain has mostly illustrated her pleasant life on Malta, but slowly the feeling conveyed in the second stanza of the poem makes its way into the chapter, first with the uncle and then through a letter of Edward’s on the death of two of his friends. The first lines of the second stanza ask the instigator of their journey “what of the Dead?” (l. 9). This idea is explored by Brittain by use of a newspaper in which the War Cabinet rejected a ‘negotiated peace’: as in the poem a vague authority, which could be read as an ancient God, here controls the lives and the deaths in particular of many people. The contemplations on the meaning of death lead up to Victor getting wounded. In her diary Brittain wonders whether, if he has already died since her last letter, he is aware of his “supreme glory”.¹⁴⁹ Thus, she contrasts the first and second stanzas of her poem: the glory through a heroic death is questioned by Victor not being aware of it if he has passed away. Brittain then moves on to the third stanza, by exploring what is to do for the ones that survive, who cannot attain the glory: “All I ask is that I may fulfil my own small weary part in this War in such a way as to be worthy of Them, who die and suffer pain”¹⁵⁰. In the poem, the deceased are described in the following line: “Where lost men’s bones gleam white in the shrouded silence” (l. 15).

The last stanza of the poem also deals with the survivors of the war and what is left for them. Throughout the chapter Brittain’s friend Victor Richardson had been important in indicating the initial heroism and the fear of what would happen after death in his letters, which helps giving stability to Brittain’s narrative, according to Badenhause: because male wartime accounts were seen as the norm, they provide a base for her own thoughts.¹⁵¹ After he is wounded, he also represents the living, who unavailingly continue their search for the mythical island, without those brave young that died. Brittain exemplifies this by means of a newspaper article, in which a Lady is in search of a wounded soldier, whom she can marry and take care of. Brittain then similarly decides to leave her own magical island, to see if Victor (Badenhause says she chose Geoffrey Thurlow as a “substitute marriage partner”, but this is

¹⁴⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 278.

¹⁴⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 279.

¹⁴⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 309.

¹⁵⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 309.

¹⁵¹ Badenhause, “Mourning through Memoir,” 437.

incorrect¹⁵²) would marry her, so they can both go on in life. Victor unfortunately dies shortly after she arrives, (and not just before as Badenhausen states¹⁵³), and thus joins “the Dead”, whereas Brittain is left to search for a life worth living.

Whereas Brittain used intertextuality to compare her experiences with those of Leighton in the first part of *Testament of Youth*, she uses letters here to compare ideas that have to do with the War and its consequences. She therefore not only adopts the physical aspect of the soldier’s life into her work, but also their mental quandaries. This deeper level of breaking with combat Gnosticism improves Brittain’s authority claim.

¹⁵² Badenhausen, “Mourning through Memoir,” 436.

¹⁵³ Badenhausen, “Mourning through Memoir,” 425.

5.2.2.3 *“Between the Sandhills and the Sea” and “The Last Post”*

“The Last Post”

The stars are shining bright above the camps,
The bugle calls float skyward, faintly clear;
Over the hill the mist-veiled motor lamps
Dwindle and disappear.

The notes of day’s goodbye arise and blend
With the low murmurous hum from tree and sod,
And swell into that question at the end
They ask each night of God –

Whether the dead within the burial ground
Will ever overthrow their crosses grey,
And rise triumphant from each lowly mound
To greet the dawning day.

Whether the eyes which battle sealed in sleep
Will open to reveille once again.
And forms, once mangled, into rapture leap,
Forgetful of their pain.

But still the stars above the camp shine on,
Giving no answer for our sorrow’s ease,
And one more day with the Last Post has gone,
Dying upon the breeze.

Whereas the previous chapter dealt with how the survivors have to go on without knowing what happens to their loved ones after death, “The Last Post” considers the resurrection of the latter by God. The poem is made up of five stanzas of four lines. The first three lines of each stanza are written in iambic pentameter, whereas the last is written in iambic trimeter. The use of the iamb, a rising foot usually used for encomiastic poetry, gives the poem a hopeful note, even though its first and last stanza describe the living hearing the sad tones of the ‘Last Post’, “giving no answer for our sorrow’s ease” (l. 18). The three stanzas in the middle, however, contemplate whether God will ever allow the fallen to rise again without pain.

Compared to the previous chapters, it is more difficult to link “The Last Post” to the chapter it introduces. Intertextually “Between the Sandhills and the Sea” mainly incorporates letters from and to Edward, in which both relate their current situation and therefore do not correspond with the topic matter of “The Last Post”. However, there are indeed instances, in which life after death and resurrection are contemplated, but they are not plentiful. In the beginning of the chapter there are three cases to which the poem applies.

After Victor Richardson's death, Brittain decides to go work in a hospital in France, where she is charged with the care for German prisoners. "The Last Post" is sounded to honour all of the dead and it can therefore be linked to her incorporation of the reaction of the Germans, who know they are about to die. The main evidence that there is an intertextual link to the poem, is that Brittain quotes a passage from the German translation of the Lord's Prayer, which they were praying on their death beds: "Und vergieb uns unsere Schulden, wie wir unsern Schuldigern vergeben. Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung, sondern erlöse uns von dem Übel. Denn Dein ist das Reich und die Kraft und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit, Amen".¹⁵⁴ It is significant that she only quotes this passage, because this particular passage is about the forgiving of the sins of both parties, which makes all men equal in death. Similarly in "The Last Post", the death will be released of their earthly pains through God's power. Brittain further directly quotes a nurse, who opens a window above someone who has died to let their souls out. Similarly upon hearing a sermon at Bologne, Brittain only cites a plea to forgive sins, to redeem the people and "be not angry with us forever"¹⁵⁵, which may refer to resurrection.

Secondly, the correspondence between Edward and Vera also testifies their contemplations on what may happen after death and thus early on imply Edward's fate. In his first letter after the poem, Edward writes on what he hopes will happen after death, quoted directly in *Testament of Youth*: "You know that, as I promised, I will try to come back if I am killed".¹⁵⁶

However, the most important link to the poem occurs later in the chapter, when Brittain reports a dialogue she hears between wounded soldiers in her ward. The importance of this dialogue is emphasized by its length - a couple of pages -, completely in direct speech, with dialect traits and colloquialisms included to represent truthfulness. Their stories are introduced by one soldier saying: "There's some mighty queer things happenin' on the Somme just now, ain't there, mate?"¹⁵⁷ The first re-encountered a Captain, who had been very helpful towards his men during the fight of the Somme before he died, and this Captain praises them for surviving. The second saw stretcher-bearers carrying out men from the woods after they had been reported dead. The third remembers giving a biscuit to a man he helped burying a few days earlier. All these 'queer things' have in common that the dead are amongst the living again and helping them, which was supposed to be a shared belief in the army.¹⁵⁸ Following the

¹⁵⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 345.

¹⁵⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 335.

¹⁵⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 330.

¹⁵⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 378.

¹⁵⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 382.

dialogue Brittain includes a poem sent to her by Leighton's mother, which corresponds to this theme as well:

And there in front of the men were marching,
With feet that made no mark,
The grey old ghosts of the ancient fighters
Come back again from the dark.¹⁵⁹

As this was quite a long chapter, the lack of intertextual references to the poem is surprising, especially compared to the first part, in which topics were far more clearly introduced and discussed, which I will elaborate on in the conclusion. Throughout this chapter there was a clear focus on her correspondence with Edward and her experiences as a nurse in France, both of which overshadowed the topic matter of "The Last Post". As a result there was a decline in the amount of intertextuality, because nursing brings Brittain closer to the soldiers and to the front, which guarantees the authenticity of her experiences and grants her the authority to relate them.

¹⁵⁹ Mackintosh, quoted in Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 382.

5.2.2.4 "This Loneliest Hour" and "Roundel"

"Roundel"

I walk alone, although the way is long,
And with gaunt briars and nettles overgrown;
Though little feet are frail, in purpose strong
I walk alone.

Around me press, unknowing and unknown,
In lampless longing the insensate throng,
Seeing but the shadow that my star has thrown.

Across the sundering seas my heart's wild song
Wakes in you joy for my joy, moan for moan.
What if, when Life on Love can wreak no wrong,
I walk alone?

Before I begin to discuss the poem "Roundel", the title of the chapter "This Loneliest Hour" takes the reader back to the beginning of the second part, more precisely to May Wedderburn Cannan's "When the Vision dies...": "Know this is your War; in the loneliest hour you ride | Down the roads he knew" (ll. 5-6). This indicates that, even though Leighton has been dead for a while and Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson have passed in the previous chapters, Brittain is not yet allowed to reach the consolatory end of Wedderburn Cannan's poem; in other words, the loneliest hour will occur in this chapter.

"Roundel" reiterates this in its theme: the poem was written by Leighton in 1914, so before he even left for the war. It consists of 11 lines, of which all are written in iambic pentameter except for lines 4 and 11, both of which are "I walk alone", emphasizing that this is what is most important in the poem. Bishop and Bostridge give the full title of the poem: "Roundel (Vera Speaks)"¹⁶⁰ and therefore I disagree with Holt et al. that the poem is about "the lonely, tormenting path [Leighton] was treading".¹⁶¹ More likely Leighton was imagining what it would be like for Brittain if he died and there is a strong inclination to suggest that Brittain feels similar as she introduces the poem at the beginning of the chapter in which she will finally become completely alone. In the first stanza he hopes that she will keep on walking strongly, even though she is alone, but that turns into a question in the last stanza.

¹⁶⁰ A.G. Bishop and Mark Bostridge, eds., *Letters from a Lost Generation. The First World War Letters of Vera Brittain and Four Friends – Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain, Victor Richardson, Geoffrey Thurlow* (London: Little Brown, 1998), 360.

¹⁶¹ Tonie Holt et al., *Violets from Oversea. Poets of the First World War* (Michigan: Leo Cooper, 1996), 50.

Having returned home to take care of her mother, Brittain feels alone before the death of the last contemporary she really cares about. To indicate the small-mindedness of civilians at the Home Front, she includes a poem by Sir Owen Seaman, which had been published in *Punch*. The poem praises civilians for their concern for the nation and the War, however. Brittain, however, contrasts this to what she really experiences and feels alone in that the rest of England only seems to care about the price of milk: “[the poet] had ignored - perhaps intentionally - the less disinterested crowd to whom the ‘little things’ went on mattering more than the Army’s anguish”¹⁶².

Her sense of purposelessness increases when her last epistolary correspondent dies. She uses manifest intertextuality to construe what has caused her “to walk alone”: “Regret to inform you Captain E. H. Brittain M.C. killed in action Italy June 15th”.¹⁶³ With that her four best friends have passed away and she thus is truly alone. In his poem, Leighton wonders whether Brittain will be strong and again she turns to work to forget her grief. However, instead of finding comfort in them kneeling by her side at night as Wedderburn Cannan suggested, Brittain turns to lines from Sir Walter Raleigh: “Even such is Time, that takes in trust / Our youth, our joys, our all we have / And pays us but with earth and dust”.¹⁶⁴ She thus chooses solitude instead of believing that she is not alone.

Before the end of this part she returns to the topic, when the Armistice is declared, by quoting a letter she sent to Leighton, in which she wonders whether she will cheer when the Armistice is finally declared or whether she will be alone. The latter has proved to be true. She finally summarises it as follows: “For the first time I realized, with all that full realization 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”.¹⁶⁵ With this conclusion she contradicts what she has been exploring in the poems of the previous chapters “We Shall Come no More” and “The Last Post”. As “When the Vision Dies...” those had at least expressed the possibility of a re-encounter after death, but Brittain concludes the second part alone, bereft of what she used to have.

¹⁶² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 394.

¹⁶³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 401.

¹⁶⁴ Sir Walter Raleigh, quoted in Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 408.

¹⁶⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 424.

5.2.3 Part III

“Longumque illud tempus, quum non ero, magis me movet quam hoc exiguum”.¹⁶⁶ This line by Cicero is the only introduction for the third and last part of *Testament of Youth*. Loosely translated into English, it means that the producer of this text cares more about the long Hereafter, than about the short time left to him/her on Earth. Consequently, in Part III Brittain will try to live a valuable life, but finds it hard to let go of what she has lost during the War. In trying to make the world a more peaceful place, she will become the “informed, liberal thinker” Mellown considers her to be.¹⁶⁷ *Testament of Youth* ends with a new beginning for Brittain, which may denote that Brittain eventually learns to appreciate life again.

5.2.3.1 “Survivors not Wanted” and “The Lament of the Demobilised”

“The Lament of the Demobilised”

‘Four years,’ some say consolingly. ‘Oh well,
What’s that? You’re young. And then it must have been
A very fine experience for you!’
And they forget
How others stayed behind and just got on –
Got on the better since we were away.
And we came home and found
They had achieved and men revered their names,
But never mentioned ours;
And no one talked heroics now, and we
Must just go back and start again once more.
‘You threw for years into the melting-pot –
Did you indeed!’ these others cry. ‘Oh well,
The more fool you!’
And we’re beginning to agree with them.

“The Lament of the Demobilised” was written by Brittain in 1920, shortly after she quit nursing and returned to Oxford. Free verse and colloquialisms construe a discourse close to a real conversation. The poem offers two different ways of looking at active war-service: on the one hand some see it as a “fine experience”, because four years is not that long for the young (l. 3). On the other hand, and less consolingly, others think helping has been a waste of time and has been foolish (ll. 12-14). Consequently the tenth chapter deals with Brittain trying to fit into the post-war world, where having served and survived makes her an outsider. Throughout the chapter she gradually starts building a life for herself and eventually starts travelling with her

¹⁶⁶ Cicero, quoted in Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 425.

¹⁶⁷ Mellown, “Reflections on Feminism and Pacifism in the Novels of Vera Brittain,” 215.

friend Winifred Holtby. This latter part of the chapter is intertextually less dense, so I will therefore focus on the first part. Interestingly, as in the second chapter, another poem can be linked interdiscursively to this chapter, as a result of Brittain's struggle to deal with the aftermath of the War.

Brittain illustrates that V.A.D.s were initially thanked by authorities for their work during the War by incorporating an Order from Sir Douglas Haig. However, the mood of the chapter soon shifts when a poem by Alfred Noyes shows the discontent of the older generation with the younger's abundant dancing. The opinions expressed in the poem, are one of the reasons Brittain gives for wanting to go back to Oxford: i.e. she wanted to escape "relatives, who only wanted to be told how splendid our dear boys had been at the front, and how uplifting it was to be on active service in hospital, and how edifying to have had a lover and a brother who had died for their country".¹⁶⁸ To this indirect quotation, she adds a direct quotation that represents her disappointing welcome at Oxford: the only change the principal acknowledged was that Brittain moved to another building, which again diminishes the catastrophic effect the War had had on Brittain's generation by ignoring it. She emphasises the civilians' ignorance a second time by means of direct quotation, by citing the welcome of an ex-soldier back at Oxford, who is told "[...] you've been away a long time, I think; a very long time? It's a pity – a great pity; you'll have to work very hard to catch up with the others".¹⁶⁹ The incorporation of this soldier's misfortune as well as her own, indicates that it were not just women, who were demobilised and expected to give up the advances they had made by entering male-dominated occupations, as Albrinck suggests.¹⁷⁰ Albrinck further notes that all attention after the War turned to ex-soldiers, whereas the women were not praised for their achievements.¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, Brittain focusses more on the generational conflict between the old and the young, and thus categorises herself as part of the same group as the male soldier. Therefore, in relating his story as a parallel to her own, she uses him to establish her own authority to speak on the matter, as she previously did during the War with her soldier friends' letters. Analogously, "The Lament of the Demobilised" is about male and female war-workers, because "demobilised" does not indicate a gender distinction.

Though "Survivors not Wanted" dealt with Brittain's return to society after the end of the War, only a few intertextual remarks refer to "The Lament of the Demobilised". Rather

¹⁶⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 434.

¹⁶⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 436.

¹⁷⁰ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 276.

¹⁷¹ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 277.

Brittain explores the Victorian motif of the mirror, as can be found in Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's "The Other Side of the Mirror".¹⁷² In my opinion, the mirror indicates that the problematised relationship between the demobilised and the civilians continued after the War. Albrinck similarly focusses, not on the manliness of the beard Brittain thinks she has, but on the unnaturalness of a woman with a beard.¹⁷³ The beard therefore indicates the problematised relationship between the self and a society one does not feel a part of.

Coleridge's poem opens with the lines "I sat before my glass one day, | And conjured up a vision bare" (ll.1-2). Lexically this corresponds with Brittain's first account of her hallucinations: "I looked one evening into my bedroom glass and thought, with a sense of incommunicable horror, that I detected in my face the signs of some sinister and peculiar change. A dark shadow seemed to lie across my chin; was I beginning to grow a beard like a witch? ".¹⁷⁴ Firstly, both use the word 'glass' instead of the more conventional and less poetic 'mirror'. Secondly by using the verb 'conjure up', which in the OED is described as "to raise or bring into existence as by magic", can be linked to Brittain seeing herself as a witch¹⁷⁵. Brittain mentions this effect of mirrors on her on two more occasions in the chapter: they show her that the woman with the beard does not fit into society anymore and the incommunicability of the situation, as described by Brittain in the previous citation, worsens. The inability to communicate the horror is explored in the third stanza of "The Other Side of the Mirror":

Her lips were open - not a sound
Came though the parted lines of red,
Whate'er it was, the hideous wound
In silence and secret bled.
No sigh relieved her speechless woe,
She had no voice to speak her dread (Coleridge ll. 13-18).

The last time Brittain tries to speak about the war, she feels utterly humiliated and therefore she decides never to speak about it again: her initial attempt to speak about it corresponds with the Coleridge's open lips: they are open as if to speak, but no sound passes the lips as society has silenced her. "The hideous wound" left by the War, which is still bleeding, has to heal in silence. Thematically "The Lament" touches on this as well: "And no one talked heroics now, and we | Must just go back and start again once more" (ll. 10-11). These lines are written in iambic pentameter, therefore the stress on 'just' enhances the mockery of how reintegrating should be easy.

¹⁷² Appendix 5

¹⁷³ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 284.

¹⁷⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 443.

¹⁷⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "Conjure"

In sum, Brittain uses manifest intertextuality in this chapter to align herself with the surviving soldiers after the end of the War, in contrast to the civilians, and constitutive intertextuality to depict this problematised relationship. Brittain slowly starts healing after she befriends Winifred Holtby. The manifest intertextuality in this chapter mainly consists of letters between them and practically ceases to exist when they start travelling together.

5.2.3.2 “Piping for Peace” and “The Superfluous Woman”

“The Superfluous Woman”

Ghosts crying down the visits of the years,
Recalling words
Whose echoes long have died,
And kind moss grown
Over the sharp and blood-bespattered stones
Which cut our feet upon the ancient ways.
* * * * *
But who will look for my coming?

Long busy days where many meet and part;
Crowded aside
Remembered hours of hope;
And city streets
Grown dark and hot with eager multitudes
Hurrying homeward whither respite waits.
* * * * *
But who will seek me at nightfall?

Light fading where the chimneys cut the sky;
Footsteps that pass,
Nor tarry at my door.
And far away,
Behind the row of crosses, shadows black
Stretch out long arms before the smouldering sun.
* * * * *
But who will give me my children?

Although it is less prominent, Britain’s struggle for reintegration of the previous chapter, continues in “Piping for Peace”. Whereas “The Lament of the Demobilised” articulated the problems of a generation, “The Superfluous Woman” asks more personal questions, not about the present, but about the speaker’s future. It consists of three seven-line stanzas, of which each seventh line is separated from the others by asterisks and italicization. In the first stanza nature is restoring itself after a catastrophe: “And kind moss grown | Over the sharp and blood-bespattered stones” (ll. 4-5). In the second stanza cities are repopulated and life of humans goes on. In the third stanza the sun is setting and the speaker sits at home alone, pondering about a row of crosses. The lines in italics are: “*But who will look for my coming? [...] But who will seek me at night? [...] But who will give me my children?*” (ll. 7, 14, 21). Not only typographically did those lines therefore differ from the other verses of the poem, but they also

show that whereas the rest of the world is slowly rebuilding itself, the speaker worries what the future means to her and how she will function in this world.

Brittain will try not to be superfluous on three levels in this chapter: firstly through pacifism, secondly through feminism, - both are causes which she vehemently promotes in *Testament of Youth*¹⁷⁶ - and thirdly through authorship. The new roles of pacifist, feminist and author she assumes, help to support her independency. Though “The Superfluous Woman” questioned the role of spinsters after the War, Brittain clarifies that promoting the League of Nations, i.e. pacifism, gives her a purpose: “It may be Utopian, but it’s constructive. It’s better than railing at the present state of Europe, or always weeping in darkness for the dead”¹⁷⁷, she writes in a letter to Holtby.

A woman who has succeeded in obtaining a promising literary career after the War is exemplified by Rose Macaulay, an accomplished writer. Because she is such a prominent character in this chapter, her “unsuperfluousness” is foregrounded and contrasted with the literary struggles of Brittain and Holtby, most of which is again described in letters. After Macaulay’s intervention, Brittain tries to convince Holtby that they, as young female writers, are needed because they can criticise society from a distance and therefore change gender distinctions.

The actual term ‘superfluous’ is used when Brittain explores post-war feminism. Because many men died during the War “the excessive female population was habitually described, non too flatteringly, as ‘superfluous’, although the teachers, nurses, doctors and Civil Servants of whom it was largely composed were far more socially valuable than many childless wives and numerous irresponsible married mothers”.¹⁷⁸ Brittain is complaining here about the ineligibility of women to vote. Likewise, in her poem women’s questions are overlooked while society is rebuilding itself. As a critique she inserts a letter to Holtby, which paraphrases a *Times* article, that advocates women to go search for a husband abroad. Brittain, however, by now answers the questions she asked in the poem: she does not mind being superfluous as long as she can continue her work. She reiterates this conclusion shortly after criticizing the *Times*, and again mentions writing the poem “The Superfluous Woman”¹⁷⁹. The chapter further includes

¹⁷⁶ Mellown, “One Woman’s Way to Peace: The Development of Vera Brittain’s Pacifism,” *Frontiers* 8, no. 2 (1985), 2.

¹⁷⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 494.

¹⁷⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 529.

¹⁷⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 532.

an extract of the feminist Doris Stevens, which also touches upon the aftermath of the War for the suffrage movement and how women are belittled.¹⁸⁰

Near the end of the chapter the focus shifts back to Brittain's authorship, more importantly to her succeeding in publishing her first novel and thus putting her name on the literary landscape, escaping the feeling of redundancy. Overall "Piping for Peace" is the chapter with the least intertextual references in the entire monography. Its subject matter is mostly political or describes Brittain's writing process. Whereas in the previous chapter she aligned herself with the demobilised war workers, she set herself apart in "Piping for Peace" as she did in "Provincial Young-Ladyhood" by showcasing her own intellectualism.

¹⁸⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 534.

5.2.3.3 “Another Stranger” and “Hédauville”

“Hédauville”

The sunshine on the long white road
That ribboned down the hill,
The velvet clematis that clung
Around your window-sill,
Are waiting for you still.

Again the shadowed pool shall break
In dimples round your feet,
And when the thrush sings in your wood,
Unknowing you may meet
Another stranger, Sweet.

And if he is not quite so old
As the boy you used to know,
And less proud, too, and worthier,
You may not let him go –
(and daisies are truer than passion-flowers)
It will be better so.

Leighton’s “Hédauville” was first introduced in work in the chapter “When the Vision Dies...”, when, after his death, his gear is returned to England. He had written the poem in a little black book in November 1915. In that chapter the poem served as his voice in a dialogue with Brittain on what to do after your lover has died. Whereas Brittain in her poems “Perhaps... To R.A.L.” and “May Morning” indicated that she would not find happiness again, the inclusion of Leighton’s poem here, reopens that dialogue and obviously, through the combination with the title of the chapter, paves the way for the introduction of a new partner in her life. Therefore this last chapter of Brittain’s story mainly serves to present us with her future husband. Intertextually the chapter remains interesting, though, because in contrast to Leighton’s input, George Catlin, or ‘G.’ as Brittain calls him, is often not allowed to express his opinion.

At the beginning of the chapter it does seem as if letters by G. will get a prominent role, similar to those of Leighton, Richardson and Edward Brittain previously. He is introduced by a short card, inviting Brittain to tea, the importance of which is highlighted through the typographical insertion of white space around the text, in contrast to the Holtby’s embedded letters of the previous chapters.

When she finally accepts G. as a part of her future she realises that “daisies are truer than passion flowers” (l. 15): “I was already reflecting how different the peaceful independence of post-war courtship was from the struggle against intrusive observation which has harassed

Roland and myself in 1914”¹⁸¹. G.’s letters and opinions, however, are limited to this courtship. As soon as Brittain resumes her pacifist work for the League of Nations and travels abroad, his responses to her numerous thoughts on the political situation in Europe are not recorded, whereas she does directly quotes her own letters.¹⁸²

With their impending marriage G. gets a voice again in a long epistolary dialogue on the subject of marriage. However immediately afterwards, Brittain mentions “Hédauville”, wondering whether Leighton would really approve of her new suitor, directly quoting some words from the poem.¹⁸³ In doing so, she re-contextualises the poem again, after having it inserted twice in the memoir already and now reinterprets it in the light of an actual ‘another stranger’. To validate her final decision of marrying G., Brittain incorporates some lines by William Ernest Henley: “Under the sway | Of death the past’s enormous disarray | Lies hushed and dark”.¹⁸⁴ The final intertextual dialogue on this chapter is the following:

And I thought: ‘We’ll be married at St James’s, Spanish Place, and I’ll carry, not lilies nor white heather, but the tall pink roses with a touch of orange in their colouring and the sweetest scent in the world, that Roland gave me one New Year’s Eve a lifetime ago. When the wedding is over, I’ll give them to Roland’s mother; I know G. will understand why.’ And the letter which crossed the Atlantic agreeing with my plans showed me how truly he had indeed understood. ‘That it is I,’ he wrote, ‘who shall stand there is but the end of a long story’.¹⁸⁵

This conversation concludes intertextuality in Brittain’s memoir, where the poem did so too: another man has come into Brittain’s life, but she does not have to forget the writer of “Hédauville”.

The entire third part of the novel serves to counter the following statement by Badenhausen: “One of the functions of the memoir, then, is [...] to discover a community that will heed her testimony. That she finds solace in the voices of the dead hardly surprises, given the fact she feels no connection to the living. In writing a community of listeners, Brittain recovers the lost voices of loved ones within the secure boundaries of memoir”.¹⁸⁶ This could be true to a certain extent for the first and second parts of the novel, although I prefer to see the dead as speakers, not as mere listeners. In the last part of the novel however, Brittain gradually regains affinity with the living, such as Holtby and George Catlin, and they get to voice their opinions too. At first she used intertextuality to align herself with the surviving soldiers.

¹⁸¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 567.

¹⁸² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 573-575.

¹⁸³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 603.

¹⁸⁴ William Ernest Henley, quoted in Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 604.

¹⁸⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 606.

¹⁸⁶ Badenhausen, “Mourning through Memoir,” 428.

However, afterwards she establishes herself as a noteworthy person with valuable thoughts as a writer, pacifist and feminist. The very last chapter shows a reconciliation between her old life and her new life, indicating that the war workers can build a new life for themselves without fully forgetting the War as civilians may try to do.

5.3 The Parts in Relation to One Another

A page-to-page analysis has proven that Brittain uses intertextual references, both manifest and interdiscursive, essentially on every page. In the foreword of *Testament of Youth* Brittain explains why the monography looks the way it does. On the incorporation of letters and diary excerpts she writes the following:

I have also made as much use as possible of old letters and diaries, because it seemed to me that the contemporary opinions, however crude and ingenuous, of youth in the period under review were at least as important a part of its testament as retrospective reflections heavy with knowledge. I make no apology for the fact that some of these documents renew with fierce vividness the stark agonies of my generation in its twenties.¹⁸⁷

She thus claims the documents she used to be legitimate and goes on to say that she aimed to portray her generation realistically.

The highest amount of intertextuality is manifested in the first part of *Testament of Youth*. Particularly in the first half it is used to depict pre-war society and growing up in an upper-middleclass rural village. Brittain also frequently uses quotations to underline differences in gender roles. A major shift takes place when Brittain starts nursing. Before that she had either used intertextuality to portray the youth of her generation or what her fiancé experienced at the front. Nursing allows her to compare her experiences with those of soldiers through letter communication. Whereas before that she had used direct speech, articles, her diary and so on to give a truthful depiction, the kind of intertextual references mainly shifts to letters after she starts nursing.

Before Brittain leaves for Malta, part II opens with a chapter on how she deals with losing Leighton. Intertextuality is still important in this chapter, as it has a consoling function for Brittain in many ways. However, whereas manifest intertextuality was part of nearly every page in the first part, active service abroad allows Brittain to narrate her experiences without much intertextual support, because it brings her closer to the War, which the London hospital had done to a smaller extent. When she does use intertextuality to convey a dialogue between soldiers in her ward, to prove her proximity to the War, she transcribes their words, including colloquialisms and abbreviations to indicate the truthfulness of her memoir. However, apart from her experiences, she still uses intertextuality, mainly in the form of letters, to illustrate different thoughts that have to do with the War, such as what happens after death and what to do if one survives.

¹⁸⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, xxvi.

The amount of intertextuality is drastically reduced in the third part of *Testament of Youth*, which deals with the aftermath of the War. Whereas at the beginning of this part, she still tries to link herself to an ex-soldier, who is also returning to Oxford, intertextuality soon becomes a platform for her letter communication to Holtby and to explain some official documents and acts. Even though some characters get to voice an opinion, she mainly quotes her own letters and writings on political topics. Therefore, the chapter in which she establishes herself as a pacifist, a feminist and a writer, chapter XI, is the chapter with the least intertextual support.

In sum, there is an evolution from Brittain feeling the need to provide evidence for everything she sees, hears and feels and moreover, to justify the importance of those things to her expressing her political views freely and criticises others openly, without justifying that some authority was taking a similar stance. In the first part she showcased her intellectualism, which made her different from complacent civilians and in the second part she proved to have been actively engaged in the War. By surviving the War and engaging herself with the problems of the world after the War, she has become established herself as a figure of authority, because even though the soldiers are not completely silenced after death through references to what they have written, they cannot speak about what has to happen after the War.

6. Conclusion

Whereas the canonisation of the trench poets and prose written by soldiers caused women's literature of the First World War to be forgotten, Brittain attempted to write a comprehensive work that would put some women's war efforts back on the map. Tate notes that "combatants often express the belief that only those who were present can really understand the enormity of the experience" and is convinced that this is indeed the case.¹⁸⁸ Conversely, Trotter asks rhetorically whether there is a better way to grasp the impact of the war on the human body and mind than the people who had to repair them, namely the nurses.¹⁸⁹ Vera Brittain, among other female writers, had to challenge the general belief in order for readers to take her war experiences seriously. As Bostridge states: Brittain "made no 'puerile' claim that women's suffering and service in the war was the same as that of men, but she did argue that a woman who had worked with the armies could provide a wider and more truthful picture of the conflict than the soldier whose knowledge was inevitably confined to a small corner of the front".¹⁹⁰ Albrinck focussed on how Brittain used a first-person narrator to take up and criticise discourse on women during the First World War.¹⁹¹ Albrinck's analysis of feminist discourse, however, is too narrow. She is intent on seeing an evolution from a feminine young girl to a more masculine, independent post-war woman. To prove this statement she states that Brittain's obsession with clothes is characteristic to her pre-war behaviour.¹⁹² However, this claim can be easily disproved as even after the war Brittain worries about her looks (she includes a letter to her mother describing her clothes she wore on different occasions, for example¹⁹³). Albrinck does recognize that Brittain uses a "collage technique, bringing together letters, diary entries, poems, and first-person narration to create as comprehensive a view on the war as possible."¹⁹⁴ Instead of focussing on the first-person narration solely, this paper aimed to give a comprehensive analysis of intertextuality in *Testament of Youth*: it explored how Brittain constructed her text in order to claim authority to speak on the War and to guarantee the authenticity of her work.

A first, superficial reason Brittain has the authority to write on the War, is simply her survival¹⁹⁵: because she lived through it, she has the ability to see the full picture. Therefore she

¹⁸⁸ Tate, "The First World War: British Writing," 165.

¹⁸⁹ Trotter, "The British Novel and the War," 36.

¹⁹⁰ Bostridge, "Vera's Testament is Young Again".

¹⁹¹ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 279.

¹⁹² Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 280.

¹⁹³ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 469.

¹⁹⁴ Albrinck, "Borderline Women," 281.

¹⁹⁵ Badenhausen, "Mourning through Memoir," 432.

can use a comprehensive amount of documents that date back to the War and its aftermath to construct her text.

Overall Brittain uses intertextuality in different ways to support her authority claim: firstly, the title of the work characterises it as an objective account, as a testament is an official document. Moreover, she attempted to write the testament of “youth”, a generation, not just her personal story, which also takes away subject from its subjectivity.

On the other hand Brittain equally draws authority from the fact that she wrote as truthful as possible to her personal experiences. Tate notes that during the War readers felt like they could learn something about what the war was really like by reading the works of the trench poems, whose accounts were thought to be authentic.¹⁹⁶ Therefore Brittain starts her autobiography by indicating how little she knew of the War and how unimportant she considered it to be in the light of her own problems. Hence the strange mix of War and Oxford she offers in “Oxford versus War”: she shows that the War gradually gained in importance for the people at the Home Front. Even after it has started, she questions whether she really understands what Leighton is going through at the front.¹⁹⁷ Brittain combines this honesty with an unromanticised content and intertextuality in order to lay claim to the historical accuracy and value of *Testament of Youth*.

Brittain further emphasises just how unromanticised her work is by insisting on her own intellectualism. In “Provincial Young-Ladyhood” she introduces Leighton, who excels in a militarist and heroism-valuing school, as a sentimental character and contrasts this with her own level-headedness. Before that, in the first chapter of the memoir she had already started to depict the disadvantages gender brought her and she continues this topic until the last chapter, to continuously highlight prejudices against women. She also disproves her sentimentality by allowing Leighton to speak after his death. Especially in “Roundel” “Hédauville” he portrays the common soldier’s opinions in serious discussions. In proving that she does not conform to the general prejudices, she shows that the role of women was different from how Sassoon depicts it in his “Glory of Women”. Therefore literature on the War by women is more valuable than the general belief indicated.

Fourthly, Albrinck does recognize that Brittain uses a “collage technique, bringing together letters, diary entries, poems, and first-person narration to create as comprehensive a view on the war as possible.¹⁹⁸ This is especially true for the first part of the monography, where

¹⁹⁶ Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” 160.

¹⁹⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 122.

¹⁹⁸ Albrinck, “Borderline Women,” 281.

she compares her own experiences as a nurse to those of Leighton at the front. An example for this is their similar reaction to seeing a dead person for the first time in “Learning versus Life”. The letters are also used to portray a dialogue between Brittain and the soldiers on more philosophical topics such as life after death in “Tawny Island”. However, there is a transgression to less and less intertextuality as the narrative progresses. At the beginning of the third part she still uses intertextuality to align herself with the soldiers, even after the War has ended through the poem “Lament of the Demobilised” and a directly quoted encounter between a soldier and an Oxford don, similar to her own headmistress. In allying herself with the soldiers and conversing with them, she shows multiple perspectives on the War. The account is therefore not the memoir of one person, but the depiction of the conflict of a generation. This enhances the work’s authenticity and its authority, through the incorporation of historical documents.

Fifthly, the parts also show a progression in her authority claim. The first part contains the most intertextual references to letters, her diary, literature, newspapers, etc. The reason for this is that she is trying to establish her authority to speak on the war and its authenticity. Almost everything she or someone else either says, does or feels is supported with textual evidence. In the second part letters become the main source of intertextuality, however they are used differently, because Brittain starts proper active service. The amount of intertextuality lowers because she describes her own experiences with nursing, which she contrasts with what her friends write to her at the Front. Literary references and diary extracts occur to a lesser extent. In contrast to the model in which the front is the masculine sphere and the Home Front represents the female sphere, Albrinck argues that women on service are not somewhere in between, but rather that they embody complete femininity because of their mothering role, which even gives them a power over men.¹⁹⁹ In the second part of *Testament of Youth* Brittain draws on this as the amount of intertextuality gradually lessens: in other words she trusts her experience as a woman at the front is enough of a validation for what she writes. As I have indicated, this is the clearest in “Between the Sandhills and the Sea”, where displays her proximity to the soldiers by directly quoting their dialogues. The lowering amount of proof and thus higher amount of Brittain’s certainty of what she is writing is mimicked by the texts which introduce the parts. Part I opens with a fairy tale, in other words a fictional account. The second part is a poem, which is highly subjective, but no longer incorporates magical elements as the fairy tale did. Lastly, Part III opens with a citation from a Roman orator.

¹⁹⁹ Albrinck, “Borderline Women,” 274.

By exploring intertextuality I have started from a broader approach and realised that it is more likely that Brittain gains authority through the use of polyvocality. In other words, through the poems at the beginning of each chapter she introduces a topic, which she then discusses and converses about with her soldier contemporaries. The inclusion of multiple perspectives, moreover not paraphrased but in the literal words of the producer of the other perspectives, establish a sense of authenticity and thus give her the right to speak about the War. By including letters, diary extracts, poems, songs, and more, Brittain allows there to be a dialogue between different authors with different experiences within the boundaries of her own narrative. Badenhausen designated the texts by her friends as mere listeners to help her through her mourning.²⁰⁰ Instead, I have indicated that their function transgresses the passiveness of listening and the dialogue is active on both sides.

²⁰⁰ Badenhausen, "Mourning through Memoir," 424.

7. Appendix

7.1 Extract from *Sicilianische Märchen*, by Laura Gonzenbach (Included in *The Pink Fairy Book*, edited by Andrew Lang)

‘Long ago there lived a rich merchant, who besides possessing more treasures than any king in the world, had in his great hall three chairs, one of silver, one of gold, and one of diamonds. But his greatest treasure of all was his only daughter, who was called Catherine.

‘One day Catherine was sitting in her own room when suddenly the door flew open, and in came a tall and beautiful woman, holding in her hands a little wheel.

“‘Catherine,” she said, going up to the girl, “which would you rather have – a happy youth or a happy old age?”

‘Catherine was so taken by surprise that she did not know what to answer, and the lady repeated again: “Which would you rather have – a happy youth or a happy old age?”

‘Then Catherine thought to herself: “If I say a happy youth, then I shall have to suffer all the rest of my life. No, I will bear trouble now, and have something better to look forward to.” So she looked up and said: “Give me a happy old age.”

“‘So be it,” said the lady, and turned her wheel as she spoke, vanishing the next moment as suddenly as she had come.

‘Now this beautiful lady was the Destiny of poor Catherine.’

7.2 “The Happiest Girl in the World” – Augusta Webster

A week ago; only a little week:
it seems so much much longer, though that day
is every morning still my yesterday;
as all my life 'twill be my yesterday,
for all my life is morrow to my love.
Oh fortunate morrow! Oh sweet happy love!

A week ago; and I am almost glad
to have him now gone for this little while,
that I may think of him and tell myself
what to be his means, now that I am his,
and know if mine is love enough for him,
and make myself believe it all is true.

A week ago; and it seems like a life,
and I have not yet learned to know myself:
I am so other than I was, so strange,
grown younger and grown older all in one;
and I am not so sad and not so gay;
and I think nothing, only hear him think.

That morning, waking, I remembered him
"Will he be here to-day? he often comes; --
and is it for my sake or to kill time?"
and, wondering "Will he come?" I chose the
dress
he seemed to like the best, and hoped for him;
and did not think I could quite love him yet.
And did I love him then with all my heart?
or did I wait until he held my hands
and spoke "Say, shall it be?" and kissed my
brow,
and I looked at him and he knew it all?

And did I love him from the day we met?
but I more gladly danced with some one else

who waltzed more smoothly and was merrier:
and did I love him when he first came here?
but I more gladly talked with some one else
whose words were readier and who sought me
more.
When did I love him? How did it begin?

The small green spikes of snowdrops in the
spring
are there one morning ere you think of them;
still we may tell what morning they pierced up:
June rosebuds stir and open stealthily,
and every new blown rose is a surprise;
still we can date the day when one unclosed:
but how can I tell when my love began?

Oh, was it like the young pale twilight star
that quietly breaks on the vacant sky,
is sudden there and perfect while you watch,
and, though you watch, you have not seen it
dawn,
the star that only waited and awoke?

But he knows when he loved me; for he says
the first time we had met he told a friend
"The sweetest dewy daisy of a girl,
but not the solid stuff to make a wife;"
and afterwards the first time he was here,
when I had slipped away into our field
to watch alone for sunset brightening on
and heard them calling me, he says he stood
and saw me come along the coppice walk
beneath the green and sparkling arch of
boughs,
and, while he watched the yellow lights that
played

with the dim flickering shadows of the leaves
over my yellow hair and soft pale dress,
flitting across me as I flitted through,
he whispered inly, in so many words,
"I see my wife; this is my wife who comes,
and seems to bear the sunlight on with her:"
and that was when he loved me, so he says.

Yet is he quite sure? was it only then?
and had he had no thought which I could feel?
for why was it I knew that he would watch,
and all the while thought in my silly heart,
as I advanced demurely, it was well
I had on the pale dress with sweeping folds
which took the light and shadow tenderly,
and that the sunlights touched my hair and
cheek,
because he'd note it all and care for it?

Oh vain and idle poor girl's heart of mine,
content with that coquettish mean content!
He, with his man's straight purpose, thinking
"wife,"
and I but that 'twas pleasant to be fair
and that 'twas pleasant he should count me fair.
But oh, to think he should be loving me
and I be no more moved out of myself!
The sunbeams told him, but they told me
nought,
except that maybe I was looking well.
And oh had I but known! Why did no bird,
trilling its own sweet lovesong, as I passed,
so musically marvellously glad,
sing one for me too, sing me "It is he,"
sing "Love him," and "You love him: it is he,"
that I might then have loved him when he
loved,

that one dear moment might be date to both?

And must I not be glad he hid his thought
and did not tell me then, when it was soon
and I should have been startled, and not known
how he is just the one man I can love,
and, only with some pain lest he were pained,
and nothing doubting, should have answered
"No."

How strange life is! I should have answered
"No."

Oh, can I ever be half glad enough
he is so wise and patient and could wait!

He waited as you wait the reddening fruit
which helplessly is ripening on the tree,
and not because it tries or longs or wills,
only because the sun will shine on it:
but he who waited was himself that sun.

Oh was it worth the waiting? was it worth?
For I am half afraid love is not love,
this love which only makes me rest in him
and be so happy and so confident,
this love which makes me pray for longest
days
that I may have them all to use for him,
this love which almost makes me yearn for
pain
that I might have borne something for his sake,
this love which I call love, is less than love.
Where are the fires and fevers and the pangs?
where is the anguish of too much delight,
and the delirious madness at a kiss,
the flushing and the paling at a look,
and passionate ecstasy of meeting hands?
where is the eager weariness at time

that will not bate a single measured hour
 to speed to us the far-off wedding day?
 I am so calm and wondering, like a child
 who, led by a firm hand it knows and trusts
 along a stranger country beautiful
 with a bewildering beauty to new eyes
 if they be wise to know what they behold,
 finds newness everywhere but no surprise,
 and takes the beauty as an outward part
 of being led so kindly by the hand.
 I am so cold: is mine but a child's heart,
 and not a woman's fit for such a man?
 Alas am I too cold, am I too dull,
 can I not love him as another could?
 And oh, if love be fire, what love is mine
 that is but like the pale subservient moon
 who only asks to be earth's minister?
 And, oh, if love be whirlwind, what is mine
 that is but like a little even brook
 which has no aim but flowing to the sea,
 and sings for happiness because it flows?

 Ah well, I would that I could love him more
 and not be only happy as I am;
 I would that I could love him to his worth,
 with that forgetting all myself in him,
 that subtle pain of exquisite excess,
 that momentary infinite sharp joy,
 I know by books but cannot teach my heart:
 and yet I think my love must needs be love,
 since he can read me through -- oh happy
 strange,
 my thoughts that were my secrets all for me
 grown instantly his open easy book! --
 since he can read me through, and is content.

 And yesterday, when they all went away,

save little Amy with her daisy chains,
 and left us in that shadow of tall ferns,
 and the child, leaning on me, fell asleep,
 and I, tired by the afternoon long walk,
 said "I could almost gladly sleep like her,"
 did he not answer, drawing down my head,
 "Sleep, darling, let me see you rest on me,"
 and when the child, awaking, wakened me,
 did he not say "Dear, you have made me glad,
 for, seeing you so sleeping peacefully,
 I feel that you do love me utterly,
 no questionings, no regrettings, but at rest."

 Oh yes, my good true darling, you spoke well
 "No questionings, no regrettings, but at rest:"
 what should I question, what should I regret,
 now I have you who are my hope and rest?

 I am the feathery wind-wafted seed
 that flickered idly half a merry morn,
 now thrall'd into the rich life-giving earth
 to root and bud and waken into leaf
 and make it such poor sweetness as I may;
 the prisoned seed that never more shall float
 the frolic playfellow of summer winds
 and mimic the free changeful butterfly;
 the prisoned seed that prisoned finds its life
 and feels its pulses stir, and grows, and grows.
 Oh love, who gathered me into yourself,
 oh love, I am at rest in you, and live.

 And shall I for so many coming days
 be flower and sweetness to him? Oh pale
 flower,
 grow, grow, and blossom out, and fill the air,
 feed on his richness, grow, grow, blossom out,
 and fill the air, and be enough for him.

Oh crystal music of the air-borne lark,
so falling, nearer, nearer, from the sky,
are you a message to me of dear hopes?
oh trilling gladness, flying down to earth,
have you brought answer of sweet prophecy?
have you brought answer to the thoughts in
me?
Oh happy answer, and oh happy thoughts!
and which is the bird's carol, which my heart's?

My love, my love, my love! And I shall be
so much to him, so almost everything:
and I shall be the friend whom he will trust,
and I shall be the child whom he will teach,
and I shall be the servant he will praise,
and I shall be the mistress he will love,
and I shall be his wife. Oh days to come,
will ye not pass like gentle rhythmic steps
that fall to sweetest music noiselessly?

But I have known the lark's song half sound
sad,
and I have seen the lake, which rippled sun,
toss dimmed and purple in a sudden wind;
and let me laugh a moment at my heart
that thinks the summer-time must all be fair,
that thinks the good days always must be good:
yes let me laugh a moment -- may be weep.

But no, but no, not laugh; for through my joy
I have been wise enough to know the while
some tears and some long hours are in all lives,
in every promised land some thorn plants
grow,
some tangling weeds as well as laden vines:
and no, not weep; for is not my land fair,

my land of promise flushed with fruit and
bloom?
and who would weep for fear of scattered
thorns?
and very thorns bear oftentimes sweet fruits.

Oh the black storm that breaks across the lake
ruffles the surface, leaves the deeps at rest --
deep in our hearts there always will be rest:
oh summer storms fall sudden as they rose,
the peaceful lake forgets them while they die -
-
our hearts will always have it summer time.

All rest, all summer time. My love, my love,
I know it will be so; you are so good,
and I, near you, shall grow at last like you;
and you are tender, patient -- oh I know
you will bear with me, help me, smile to me,
and let me make you happy easily;
and I, what happiness could I have more
than that dear labour of a happy wife?
I would not have another. Is it wrong,
and is it selfish that I cannot wish,
that I, who yet so love the clasping hand
and innocent fond eyes of little ones,
I cannot wish that which I sometimes read
is women's dearest wish hid in their love,
to press a baby creature to my breast?
Oh is it wrong? I would be all for him,
not even children coming 'twixt us two
to call me from his service to serve them;
and maybe they would steal too much of love,
for, since I cannot love him now enough,
what would my heart be halved? or would it
grow?
But he perhaps would love me something less,

finding me not so always at his side.

Together always, that was what he said;
together always. Oh dear coming days!
O dear dear present days that pass too fast,
although they bring such rainbow morrows on!
that pass so fast, and yet, I know not why,
seem always to encompass so much time.
And I should fear I were too happy now,
and making this poor world too much my
Heaven,

but that I feel God nearer and it seems
as if I had learned His love better too.

So late already! The sun dropping down,
and under him the first long line of red --
my truant should be here again by now,
is come maybe. I will not seek him, I;
he would be vain and think I cared too much;
I will wait here, and he shall seek for me,
and I will carelessly -- Oh his dear step --
he sees me, he is coming; my own love!

7.3 “When the Vision Dies...” – May Wedderburn Cannan

When the Vision dies in the dust of the market place,
When the Light is dim,
When you lift up your eyes and cannot behold his face,
When your heart is far from him,

Know this is your War; in this loneliest hour you ride
Down the roads he knew;
Though he comes no more at night he will kneel at your side
For comfort to dream with you.

7.4 “May Morning” – Vera Brittain

The rising sun shone warmly on the tower;
Into the clear pure heaven the hymn aspired,
Piercingly sweet. This was the morning hour
When life awoke with spring’s creative power,
And the old city’s grey to gold war fired.

Silently reverent stood the noisy throng;
Under the bridge the boats in long array
Lay motionless. The choristers’ far song
Faded upon the breeze in echoes long.
Swiftly I left the bridge and rode away.

Straight to a little wood’s green heart I sped,
Where cowslips grew, beneath whose gold
withdrawn
The fragrant earth peeped warm and richly red;
All trace of winter’s chilling touch had fled,
And song-birds ushered in the year’s bright
morn.

I had met Love not many days before,
And as in blissful mood I listening lay,
None ever had of joy so full a store.
I thought that spring must last for evermore,
For I was young and loved, and it was May.

* * *

Now it is May again, and sweetly clear
Perhaps once more aspires the Latin hymn
From Magdalen tower, but not for me to hear.
I toil far distant, for a darker year
Shadows the century with menace grim.

I walk in ways where pain and sorrow dwell,
And ruin such as only War can bring,
Where each lives through his individual hell,
Fraught with remembered horror none can tell,
And no more is there glory in the spring.

And I am worn with tears, for he I loved
Lies cold beneath the stricken sod of France;
Hope has forsaken me, by death removed,
And Love that seemed so strong and gay has
proved
A poor crushed thing, the toy of cruel chance.

Often I wonder, as I grieve in vain,
If when the long, long future years creep slow,
And War and tears alike have ceased to reign,
I ever shall recapture, once again,
The mood of that May Morning, long ago.

7.5 “The Other Side of the Mirror” – Mary Elizabeth Coleridge

I sat before my glass one day,
And conjured up a vision bare,
Unlike the aspects glad and gay,
That erst were found reflected there -
The vision of a woman, wild
With more than womanly despair.
Her hair stood back on either side
A face bereft of loveliness.
It had no envy now to hide
What once no man on earth could guess.
It formed the thorny aureole
Of hard, unsanctified distress.

Her lips were open - not a sound
Came though the parted lines of red,
Whate'er it was, the hideous wound
In silence and secret bled.
No sigh relieved her speechless woe,
She had no voice to speak her dread.

And in her lurid eyes there shone
The dying flame of life's desire,
Made mad because its hope was gone,
And kindled at the leaping fire
Of jealousy and fierce revenge,
And strength that could not change nor tire.

Shade of a shadow in the glass,
O set the crystal surface free!
Pass - as the fairer visions pass -
Nor ever more return, to be
The ghost of a distracted hour,
That heard me whisper: - 'I am she!'

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