

Bachelor Thesis at the Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

The Inferiority Complex of Women during WWI:
Represented in *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain and *Diary without
Dates* by Enid Bagnold

Mariska Helmert

4001648

mariskahelmert@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr. Usha Wilbers-Frielink

Submitted to: The Department of English Language and Culture

15 June 2016

Engelse Taal en Cultuur Dr. Usha Wilbers-Frielink

BA Thesis

The Inferiority Complex of Women in WWI as Represented in *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain and *Diary without Dates* by Enid Bagnold

Bachelor Thesis ECT

15 June 2016

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

Mariska Helmert

4001648

Abstract

During the First World War some women experienced a sense of inferiority towards men, as they were able to contribute to the war in an immediate manner while women were not. These women had to cope with this female inferiority complex by themselves, having to find their own means of dealing with this. This thesis examines Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Enid Bagnold's *Diary without Dates* as two autobiographies that describe this feeling, as well as give an impression of how these women dealt with these sentiments. Working as a Voluntary Aid Detachment as well as having a creative outlet, which for Vera and Enid is writing, seem to be two key aspects in this as both women used these techniques. However, there are also differences in the mechanics these two women used. For Vera Brittain, the realisation that her friends did not have to die in vain, as well as finding a new friend in Winifred Holtby who shared the same values as she did, helped tremendously in dealing with her sense of inferiority. Enid Bagnold finds solace in publishing her diary, outing her sentiments towards VAD work and the public, in order to create a change.

Keywords:

Vera Brittain, Enid Bagnold, Female Inferiority, Testament of Youth, Diary without Dates, Writing, Voluntary Aid Detachment, VAD, autobiography, Feminism, First World War, Women in WWI.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Title	Page
	Introduction	5
1	The Position of Women in WW1	10
2	The lives of Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold	14
3	The influence of the war	24
4	Conclusion	35
	Works Cited	37

Introduction

The Great War was an important factor in the emancipation of women. Due to the amount of men that enlisted, women had to take up places in the workforce to keep the economy going. This, albeit slowly, brought about changes in the position of women in society. Before and during the war, however, some women felt that their position towards men was unjust. They experienced a sense of inferiority towards men. Some women still feel that way today, but before and during WWI these feelings were somewhat more pronounced. These women tried their best to achieve a sense of accomplishment and independence during their lives and some even tried to create a change in society. This thesis explores the autobiographies of two of these women, *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain and *Diary without Dates* by Enid Bagnold, to gain insight in this feeling of female inferiority. In order to provide a valuable investigation of this issue, it is important to note that these two women by no means generalise the female population's experiences and motives during the war. They are however representatives of the group of women who felt a sense of inferiority towards men, which makes their autobiographies key points in this research.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, Horatio Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, understood that Great Britain required a bigger army force than the one they possessed at that time. This marked the start of Kitchener's Army: an army that consisted entirely of volunteers. These volunteers were persuaded to join by means of "a direct and personal appeal to the men of Britain" ("What Was It like in Towns and Rural Areas?" par 1). On August 11 1914, the pamphlet *Your King and Country Need You: A Call to Arms* was published, which called for 100,000 volunteers to join the army immediately. According to Chris Baker, freelance military historian and researcher, "each man would sign up for new 'general service' terms of three years or the duration of the war (whichever the longer) and would agree to being sent to serve anywhere the army needed them" (Baker par 1). The pamphlet contained some rather persuasive lines such as "Lord Kitchener is confident that this appeal will be at once responded to by all those who have the safety of our empire at heart" (par 2). It was because of these kinds of persuasive texts that young men might have felt obligated to join the army. Within the span of two weeks, the 100,000 required men had enlisted. This call to arms was repeated two times more and eventually enough men volunteered that "by late 1915 even the original regular battalions had a large and increasing contingent of wartime volunteers who had replaced the losses among the professional soldiers" (Baker par 5). Men felt obligated to fight for their country and even celebrated the idea of joining the army to do

so. As they arrived at the front, however, they realised that the war was something to dread rather than something to look forward to.

The horrifying experiences soldiers endured at the front have been accounted for in hundreds of texts by those who fought at the front or were in any other way afflicted with these horrors. Wilfred Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est" and "In Flanders Fields" by John McRae are perhaps the two best known examples of these kinds of texts, written by men to give an impression of the reality and effects of war. As England was a much stronger patriarchal society during the First World War than it is today, texts written by men were the most common, whereas female writers were not taken as seriously and most of them did not gain public recognition. Adrian Barlow, series editor of Cambridge Contexts in Literature, states in *The Great War in British Literature* (2000) that "during most of the 20th century, the assumption was that the essential literature of the First World War was written by men, that women's writing was inevitably less significant as an expression of the experience of war since only men had actually fought" (26). Although it may be true that women did not have to endure the war directly from the trenches, it cannot be said that they did not suffer considerably as well. They lived an entirely different war of their own by staying at home and waiting for telegrams or letters concerning the wellbeing of their family and friends. Women could do little with that uncertainty, as the front was a place predominantly meant for men. For some of them, this resulted in the need to make themselves useful to the best of their abilities. They dealt with this need by, for example, becoming a Voluntary Aid Detachment, who provided "medical assistance in time of war" (Simkin, "Voluntary Air Detachment"), or even a nurse at the front. Similar to the male writers, some of these women have put their feelings on paper in an attempt to deal with them creatively either during the war or after. Not all of these texts were published then or even at all, but institutions like Virago Press are trying to uncover these unheard female voices and make them accessible to the public. Barlow comments that, when read today, the works published by women "add a significant dimension to any discussion of the writing of the period" (Barlow 27). The works by men only covered one part of society and the war and their views on that, but women played a completely different role in that society and experienced a different perception of it as well. So these works by women contribute to the understanding of writing in that period by widening the scope.

Vera Brittain (1893-1970) wrote an autobiography on her life during the First World War called *Testament of Youth* which was published in 1933, in which she describes that she suffered "like so many women in 1914, from an inferiority complex" (Brittain 73). Scholar Celia Patterson, explains in "Women Writers of World War I" (2010) that "that inferiority

complex was based on the sense of enforced idleness and uselessness at a time of national crisis” (Patterson par 5). In *Testament of Youth*, Vera Brittain expressed her disdain of the idea of waiting for news and staying at home while the men she loved were out fighting in the trenches, which in turn made her feel inferior to them. Vera was not the only one suffering from this inferiority complex. Actress, writer and feminist Cicely Hamilton (1872-1952) describes in her poem “Non-Combatant” (1924) how she felt during the war. The entire poem emanates the sense of inferiority with lines like:

They struck me down an idle, useless mouth,
 As cumbrous nay, more cumbrous than the dead,
 With life and heart afire to give and give I take a dole instead

 In all the length of all this eager land,
 No man has need of me
 That is my hurt my burning, beating wound;
 That is the spear-thrust driven through my pride! (Hamilton 5-8, 11-14)

She desperately feels the need to do something, yet she is not able to, which wounds her pride tremendously. Her poem ends with the lines “Let me endure it, then, with stiffened lip:/ I, even I, have suffered in the strife!/ Let me endure it then I give my pride/ Where others gave a life”(Hamilton 17-20) which shows that this feeling of inferiority to her is almost the equivalent to losing her life.

In 1973 Virago Press was founded with the aim “to put women centre stage; to explore the untold stories of their lives and histories; to break the silence around many women’s experiences; to publish breath-taking new fiction alongside a rich list of rediscovered classics; and above all to champion women’s talent” (Goodings par 1). Since then, Virago Press has published many texts by female writers who have either been forgotten or were never really known. In 1978, *Testament of Youth* was one of these and has since then been made into a television series and more recently into a film. Virago Press finds that it is important that these writers will not be forgotten. This thesis will build on this notion by highlighting two writers, Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold, who felt a sense of inferiority but decided to act on it. Vera Brittain’s memoir is called *Testament of Youth* and Enid Bagnold has written *Diary without Dates*. It is worth noting that both *Testament of Youth* and *Diary without Dates* are written in autobiographical style which makes them emotionally accessible to the reader. Vera Brittain

used this as a means of coping with her feelings for the most part as we will see, which is why the reader is more inclined to feel close to her. Enid Bagnold's *Diary without Dates* "was so critical of hospital administration that the military authorities arranged for her dismissal" ("Enid Bagnold" par 7). She was not afraid to write about what she felt and how she felt things could be better, which eventually caused her to lose her job. *Diary without Dates* is written in a diary-like form which marks it as an emotional writing style. The reader is more inclined to get personally attached to the words Enid writes as she describes true emotions and feelings. The tone she uses also switches from serious to at times even humorous, which also services to the personal theme she maintains. All this allows for a bigger impact on the reader and for Enid to get her point across more easily.

These two memoirs will be approached by means of close reading. In order to come to a full understanding of the issues presented in these memoirs, this thesis will research the historical background of these two women as well as the historical background of the First World War itself and the life and roles of women in that period. The structure of the thesis will be as follows. The first chapter is about the life of women in Britain before and during the First World War. For the historical background of WWI the BBC website will be used, a chapter from *The Great War in British Literature* (2000) by Adrian Barlow, as well as the Long, Long Trail website, "A site all about the soldiers, units, regiments and battles of the British Army of the First World War, and how to research and understand them" (Baker). This chapter will also research the role of women in WWI with the help of Spartacus Educational, the website of the Red Cross and the BBC website. The second chapter consists of a historical background comparing and contrasting Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold. In the case of Vera Brittain this will be dealt with by means of her own autobiography *Testament of Youth* (1933) as well as a biography on her life by Mark Bostridge and Paul Berry called *Vera Brittain: A Life* (1995). For Enid Bagnold it is more difficult to use her autobiography as it is focussed on her life as a VAD in the war and does not mention her personal life before the war, so the focus for her will be on the biography on her life written by Anne Sebba called *Enid Bagnold* (1986). Not much has been written on the life of Enid Bagnold, therefore Sebba's biography will be leaned upon heavily. The website "Spartacus Educational" will also be used as background research for both women. The third chapter will compare and contrast Vera and Enid's lives during and after the war. This chapter compares and contrasts why both women decided to join the VAD, how they regarded their time as VADs, the trauma they had to deal with in that period as well as how this all influenced them after the war. Mark Bostridge has written a biography concerning this part in Vera's life called *Vera Brittain and the First World War* and this book as well as her autobiography

Testament of Youth explain how she experienced this in great detail. Enid Bagnold's autobiography *Diary without Dates* will be used as reference points for her feelings as well as Anne Sebba's *Enid Bagnold*. This ultimately leads to a conclusion which will compare and contrast the two writers and their texts. It will also show that Brittain and Bagnold demonstrate their sense of female inferiority and their method of dealing with that particular sentiment in their memoirs *Testament of Youth* and *Diary without Dates*, by revealing that the best manner of dealing with this was by contributing to society as best as they could.

Chapter 1

The position of women in the Great War

In order to fully comprehend the position of Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold as women in the First World War and to get a better understanding of where their sense of inferiority originated from, it is vital to first understand the position of women in that period in general. This chapter explains the position of the feminist movement before the war and the function of women during the war as well as their new economical positions.

Before the start of the war women were already trying to change their position in society. According to Susan Kingsley Kent:

Prewar British feminists regarded their movement as an attack on separate-sphere ideology and its constructions of masculinity and femininity. They perceived relations between the sexes to be characterized by a state of war in which patriarchal laws, institutions, and attitudes rendered women vulnerable to sexual abuse and degradation, rather than by complementarity and cooperation, as separate-sphere ideologists so insistently claimed. (233)

These women believed that sexuality and masculinity as well as femininity “were products of socialization” (Kingsley Kent). They did not see it as something that was established by birth or God, but as something that had come to be because of the way society worked. By “Challenging the dominant disclosure on sexuality, they aimed finally to create a society in which the positive qualities associated with each sex could be assumed by the other, a society in which the “natural” equality and freedom of both men and women could be achieved” (Kingsley Kent 233). They wanted to create a world in which men and women were equals as well as a world in which positivity towards both sexes was a natural occurrence. These women tried very hard to achieve this, but then the war broke out and society changed.

Due to Kitchener’s call to arms in 1914, many of the young and able men were serving at the front. During the course of the war this number of men only continued to grow, leaving the home front with only women and the men who were either too old or too young to fight. The public held the perception that the war would be a short and victorious feat, but according to the war strategies of the countries who were involved in the war as well as the diary entries of leaders on all sides, they did fear the duration of the war. British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey expressed these views on the night before Britain went to war by uttering the words: “The

lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time” (Ferguson 14). The number of men fighting in the war as well as the duration of it left the home-front deprived of many able workers, which resulted in the employment of women. Kate Adie, writer for the BBC, explains this as follows: “To fill the gap left by a generation of fighting men, more than a million women took the chance to join the workforce between 1914 and 1918. They worked across the economy - from tram drivers and train cleaners, to postal workers and police patrols” (Adie par 2). Factory work was often divided into simpler tasks in order for unskilled workers to perform these tasks as well, making the work monotonous. Not only did they fill the jobs left by the men who went to fight in the war, but there was also a greater need for munitions which had to be met as well. “Munionettes,” as the women who worked in munitions factories were called, “produced 80% of the weapons and shells used by the British Army” (Airth-Kindree 80) and risked their lives daily working with poisonous substances without adequate protective clothing or the required safety measures. The health problems these women got from working in these factories sometimes outlasted the war. Handling TNT, which is used as an explosive agent in munitions, for example, eventually turned the skin yellow, which led to these women being called the “canaries” of the arms factories. Even though women were clearly needed in these fields of work and considering the safety hazards this work brought along, they were not paid accordingly, only receiving half the wages men earned. Professor of history Suzan Grayzel points out:

Returning men displaced many women from their wartime occupations, and many households now headed by women due to the loss of male breadwinners faced new levels of hardship. Women did not gain or retain access to all professions, and they did not come close to gaining equal pay for comparable work. (Grayzel par 6)

So when the war ended and the veterans returned home, these women were asked to leave their jobs again to make room for the men. Parliament did feel the need to recognise the women’s efforts in the war, however, as described in *The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of the British Feminism* by Susan Kingsley Kent:

In early 1918, in what it defined as a gesture of recognition for women’s contribution to the war effort, Parliament granted the vote to women over the age of thirty. This measure, while welcome to feminists as a symbol of the fall

of the sex barrier, failed to enfranchise some five million out of eleven million adult women. (Kent par 1)

Although these voting rights were a step in the right direction, the disappointment of having to leave their jobs and the partiality of the voting rights made this only a temporary emancipation for women.

The war did not only leave the home-front deprived of workers, but it obviously also raised the number of injured patients. As a consequence, women were demanded to apply themselves to the nursing profession. Hitherto women were not usually trained in the field of medicine, but, according to the Red Cross, due to the tremendous demand “medical degrees were opened up to women so that they could gain the knowledge and training needed to work in the medical profession” (“Women's Involvement with the British Red Cross During the First World War” par 4). The amount of nurses this opportunity created was still insufficient, so they had to find other ways to meet the demand. History teacher and writer of many historical books John Simkin states that “it was decided to form Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) to provide medical assistance in time of war. By the summer of 1914 there were over 2,500 Voluntary Aid Detachments in Britain. Of the 74,000 VADs in 1914, two-thirds were women and girls” (“Voluntary Aid Detachment” par 1). Being a VAD was the predominant employment of women during the war. These VADs were only trained in the basic medical skills so they were able to perform first aid and could carry out the less technical duties of being a nurse. This, however, did not mean that they were any less important than trained nurses. For example, they also aided in setting up auxiliary hospitals and convalescent homes for the wounded servicemen who could no longer be treated at the front. The Red Cross also set up some hospitals abroad. According to Ishobel Ross, member of the Red Cross in that time, these hospitals were “entirely neutral, helping to ease the suffering of soldiers on all sides” (“Womens involvement with the British Red Cross during the First World War”). They aided every wounded soldier that entered their doors whichever side he was from. The Red Cross explains:

Over 2,000 women offered their services in 1914, many declining a salary, and from this list, individuals were despatched to areas of hostility including France, Belgium, Serbia and Gallipoli. From 1915 onwards they were joined by partially trained women from the VADs who were posted to undertake less technical duties. (“Nursing during the First World War”)

At the start of the war the military authorities were disinclined to allow VADs at the front, but as the war continued VADs were a necessity as they could no longer cope with all the injured soldiers. The VADs that were sent into the foreign countries and to the front were no ordinary VADs: they had to meet certain prerequisites. In order to serve at the front line, a VAD had to be “over the age of twenty-three and with more than three months’ experience” (Simkin, “Voluntary Aid Detachment” par 3). This meant that these VADs had to have a certain amount of skill and experience. As these women were now skilled workers due to the training they needed to become a VAD in a foreign country it became even more difficult for these women to return to their former role as lady of the house.

These developments for women played a vital part in ultimately winning the war. Women may have not been able to follow the men into battle, but they certainly played a significant part in leading their country to victory albeit only by keeping the Home front functioning until the men returned, creating the much needed munitions for the troops and nursing the fallen men back to health. It did, however, take a lot of effort on their part to reach that point and many women found it difficult not to help their men in a more immediate manner. These women had to find their own ways of contributing to the war and moreover ways that made them feel necessary as well. Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold were two of these women. They both dealt with this struggle by working as VADs and contributing as much as they were able to. The following chapters will compare and contrast their lives and their struggle to deal with this female inferiority complex.

Chapter 2

The lives of Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold

Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold both suffered from a female inferiority complex which originated early on in their life and was only strengthened during the course of the war. They also did not feel the need to comply with the standards for women at the time, which were amongst others obedience towards their paternal figures, getting married immediately after school and pleasing their husbands in marriage. In order to understand where both these women came from and where sense of inferiority towards men originated from this chapter explores their backgrounds as well as their upbringing before the war. As their lives are in ways very similar and in other cases extremely different, this chapter will compare and contrast their lives as a starting point on their road to feminism and the sense of female inferiority.

Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold grew up in very different families. Whereas Vera grew up in a middle class family, Enid grew up in a military family. Vera Brittain was the daughter of Thomas Arthur Brittain (1864-1935), a paper manufacturer, and Edith Mary Bervon (1868-1948), who was the daughter of a local musician. Vera had one brother, called Edward Harold Brittain. Berry and Bostridge illustrate in *Vera Brittain: A Life* that she had “well-intentioned parents who possessed an inherent belief in the prerogatives of class and money” (20) explaining why class and money served as a substantial part in Vera’s upbringing. This had chiefly to do with the fact that Arthur originated from a wealthy family, who owned a paper mill. Berry and Bostridge state that:

Within fifty years of entering the paper business, the Brittain family had established themselves locally as a family of some standing and influence. They were undoubtedly ‘dowdy and stolid’, but combined with this a strong conviction of their own superiority, and an unshakeable belief in the power of money. (17)

Vera’s father had been brought up in this environment of money and establishment, which consequently made him value the same things. He eventually married Edith Bervon who was “the daughter of a local musician ‘without any money or pedigree’” (Berry, Bostridge 18), something to which his family reacted with disapproval and disappointment. She initially did not see any future in this arrangement, but “the prospect of escaping ‘from the poverty & sordidness which surrounded her for a life of steadily increasing comforts’ was an undeniably attractive one” (Berry, Bostridge 19). Even though Arthur married for love and not for wealth,

Edith's reasoning was more inclined to be on the contrary. As Berry and Bostridge stated, they still "possessed an inherent belief in the prerogatives of class and money" (20). Vera's upbringing was therefore based on class positions. She was expected to get married after she got out of school and be a good housewife, as was the general prospect of women at the time.

Enid Bagnold, however, had a rather contrasting upbringing. She was born on 27 October 1889, daughter to Ethel Alger and Arthur Bagnold and sister to Ralph Alger Bagnold. Her father's work as a colonel meant that they had to accompany him and his work schedule. Anne Sebba states in her biography that "Enid reckoned that, before she was nine, they had been quartered all over the South of England" (15). As a result of her father's service, they eventually got transferred to Jamaica due to a promotion. Anne Sebba explains:

In 1899 Bagnold was promoted lieutenant-colonel and, just before Enid's tenth birthday, went out to Jamaica as Commanding Officer, Royal Engineers. His wife, two children and Miss Evans, the governess, followed behind in an old banana carrier called the *Don*. (Sebba 16)

They resided there until her father's command was over in 1902, so Enid spent three years of her childhood being raised in Jamaica. Anne Sebba states "the children enjoyed 'perfect freedom'" (8) while they lived there. Therefore whereas Vera was growing up in a steady middle class environment and raised to be a good middle class woman, Enid grew up in different places and cultures with different influences from each location and even in 'perfect freedom' whilst in Jamaica. Even though both women had contrasting childhoods in relation to the families they were brought up in, they shared certain similarities as well: they both did not have any actual friends outside the family and they both discovered a talent for literature.

For Enid, the frequent relocating meant that she did not have the chance or time to form a close friendship for a long period of time. Her brother and her parents were the only constant in her life, although it may be said that the bond with her brother was not nearly as close as the bond Vera had with hers. As she was much older than her brother, they did not exactly connect at that age as much as Vera and Edward did, for they were only two years apart. According to Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain's only friend was her brother:

The two children led an isolated existence circumscribed by a governess, servants, and well-intentioned parents who possessed an inherent belief in the

prerogatives of class and money. In this claustrophobic environment, Vera and Edward formed a close and intimate dependence upon one another. (20)

Because they grew up in an isolated environment, being each other's only friends and companions, Vera and Edward were really close. This closeness would last throughout their childhood and even into adulthood, as Vera states herself: "By the time that we both went away to boarding-school he had already become the dearest companion of those brief years of unshadowed adolescence permitted to our condemned generation" (Brittain 27). But however good a companion Edward was for Vera, she envied his prospects of life as well. By the time she and Edward were sent to school she started to feel envious of the chances and education boys had. Berry and Bostridge state that:

Vera was to regard her brother's life at Uppingham with unconcealed envy. 'For girls – as yet – there is nothing equivalent to public schools for boys', she wrote several years later without a trace of irony, 'these fine traditions & unwritten laws that turn out so many splendid characters have been withheld from them – to their detriment'. (31)

There were schools for girls that were close equivalents to these all-boys schools, though never nearly as good, as the expectations for women differed too greatly from the expectations of men. Vera's father only regarded this as needless extravagance anyway. This meant that she not only felt envious of her brother, but at the same time she also may have felt deprived of her choices by her father.

In addition to the fact that they grew up without a large circle of friends, they were similar in that they both discovered a talent for literature. Vera was interested in reading at a very young age. She started by reading the literature from her own nursery, which consisted of "a few volumes of Andrew Lang's fairy-tales . . . and some of the more saccharine children's stories of L. T. Meade" (Brittain 26). Once those stories were exhausted she would continue to read the only other books that were at hand in her household, which were mostly yellow-back novels. Defined by The British Library, yellow-backs are "a distinctive category of cheap books which began to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century, at about the same time as W. H. Smith's first railway bookstalls" (James par 1). At the young age of eight she found *Longfellow's Complete Poems* in the drawing-room of their house and she "soon had Longfellow's poems almost by heart" (Brittain 27). This passion for literature also expressed

itself in writing. According to Berry and Bostridge “Vera would regale Edward with stories ‘of a semi-ornithological community known to us both as “The Dicks”” (Berry, Bostridge 27). They continue to recount that “between the ages of seven and eleven she produced five ‘novels’, written in special notebooks” (Berry, Bostridge 27). From a young age Vera had great imagination along with the ability and love for writing.

Enid Bagnold’s talent for literature was developed in Jamaica. She was enamoured with the beauties of the land, which had revealed the creative writer inside her. She started putting her imagination to paper, which also marked the start of her rebellion against the patriarchal figures in her life. Enid had always been intelligent. According to Sebba, “Enid’s own earliest childhood memories are of the pride her mother took in her young daughter’s quick brain. She learnt to read by the age of four and remembered with glee shouting out the advertising slogans as the train steamed past” (12-3). Sebba states that “Enid’s discovery that she enjoyed writing poems was another cause of friction with her father, partly because she indulged herself at night with only the bats and the pale moon for company” (19). He did not only fear that she would become an insomniac by only writing nocturnally, but the poems and imaginary love letters she wrote were also a cause for worry. Her grandfather recognised this too. Anne Sebba writes that:

In 1902 she wrote a little fairy play [about which] her grandfather told her that he had read the play with considerable interest, ‘but none the less, my dear grandchild, don’t do it again. If the imagination is allowed to run too far ahead before the judgement and intellect are trained to accompany it, danger comes. (20-1)

Thus the two patriarchs in her life, her father and grandfather, were both opposed to her writing and tried to cease it. Her father compromised by allowing her a maximum of three nights of writing, whereas her grandfather remarked she should stop it all together. This patriarchal interference was characteristic for that period in time. Women were not seen as equal to men then, but as slightly inferior beings who needed to be guided by men. This is what Enid’s father and grandfather were trying to do, but due to her persistent character and her love for writing she continued to defy them.

For both women these early years in their lives were marked by patriarchal interference, but they also marked the start of their rebellion against it. Vera encountered this for the first time in relation to her envy towards her brother, who had more chances as well as a better education than she had. She also experienced this through her father’s view of her education

being a needless extravagance and his deprivation of allowing her to make her own choices. Enid endured similar matters in her love for writing and the fact that her father and grandfather tried to do what they could to prevent her from satiating her talent. They saw her imagination and intellect as a dangerous combination and something women were not supposed to stimulate. This patriarchal interference, however, did not stop them from aspiring these matters and acting upon them. This signifies the first signs of their defiance against patriarchal interference as well as their first inklings towards feminism.

Due to Enid and Vera's different upbringing, their types of education contrasted as well. Vera, growing up in a steady middle class household, enjoyed education by a governess until she was eleven. Berry and Bostridge explain:

Much of Vera and Edward's childhood was spent in the charge of a succession of nursemaids, and later a governess, in the nursery at the top of the house. They were especially fortunate in their governess, Miss A.M. Newby, a plump, rubicund woman in her thirties who joined the household when Vera was five and remained for the next six years. (26)

When Vera was at the age of thirteen she was sent to a boarding-school at Kingswood in Surrey. According to John Simkin the first reason was that her father saw education for women as something "to prepare women for marriage" ("Vera Brittain" par 4). The other reason was that it was "a safe choice, because the eldest and ablest of my mother's sisters was one of the two Principles" (Brittain 29). Ironically this was also the first place where Vera came in contact with the notion of feminism. Miss Heath Jones, whom she later suspected of secretly always having been a suffragette, introduced her to the ideas of Dorothea Beale and Emily Davies, who in 1867 "drafted a petition asking Parliament to grant women the right to vote" (Simkin, "Dorothea Beale" par 5). Vera writes that Miss Heath Jones:

Even took me with one or two of the other senior girls in 1911 to what must have been a very mild and constitutional suffrage meeting in Tadworth village. This practical introduction to feminism was to be for ever afterwards associated in my mind. (33)

And she continues:

To Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* - that 'Bible of the Woman's Movement' which sounded to the world of 1911 as insistent and inspiring as a trumpet-call summoning the faithful to a vital crusade - was due my final acceptance of feminism. (34)

This book was lent to her by Miss Heath Jones soon after it was published in 1911 and as she recalls herself, it was the final push she needed to fully accept feminist activism as a part of her life. Miss Heath Jones made a great impact on her already tentative feministic mindset and expanded her mind to even greater ideas. So it was at the school which she originally attended to become a woman prepared for marriage that she "first visualised in rapt childish ecstasy a world in which women would no longer be the second-rate, unimportant creatures that they were now considered, but the equal and respected companions of men" (Brittain 35).

From an early age Enid was a high spirited young lady, which meant that getting her educated was a difficult feat. Not only did they relocate often, Enid's high spiritedness was something that discouraged some governesses. Anne Sebba writes that when they relocated to Jamaica they brought their governess with them. She, however, was promptly dispatched home and the new governess was frightened away by Enid. At first the absence of education was something she revelled in as she had all the freedom she wanted to do the things she pleased. Upon discovering her love for writing, however, this changed significantly. When they returned to England the family eventually relocated to Warren Wood, where Enid attended school at Prior's Field. According to Sebba "It was an unconventional school, with the girls allowed unusual latitude in choosing their activities. These were heavily biased towards art, literature and the theatre with little emphasis on arithmetic" (21). It was there that Enid met the first woman in her life who was an independent woman, namely her headmistress Mrs Huxley. All the women she knew up until then conformed to marital expectations as well as other general expectations of women. According to Sebba, Enid thought of these women that "whatever their other qualities, 'they were only wives, stuffed into married quarters' (21). Mrs Huxley was an exception to the norm, however, as she was headmistress of an all-girls school focussing on the cultural and liberal aspects of life rather than the necessary knowledge for marital context. This particularly inspired Enid, because she was always persistent in her desires in life whatever her patriarchal figures had to say about it.

Vera was educated from very early on in her life, for five years even by the same governess, whereas Enid's education was at times insufficient due to their many relocations and Enid's high-spirited nature. At the age of thirteen, however, both girls were sent to school. Vera

to St Monica's at Kingswood, which was a safe and traditional all-girls school and Enid went to school at Prior's Field, which was an unconventional school to say the least. It was at these schools that both women met someone who revolutionised their lives by introducing them to feminism. Vera and Enid were both inspired by these women to do more with their lives than what was expected of women at the time. It was there that they both took their first true steps towards feminism. In their own way they entered into the "prewar British feminist movement" (Kingsley Kent 233) that existed at that time.

Neither of the two women wanted to adhere to the normal standards for women at the time by getting married and settling down after school. They did not oppose the idea of marriage itself, but more so to the idea that women were in a way lesser than men and that in a marriage women were supposed to do as the men pleased. As Enid grew up, she did not intend to get married right away and she took great pleasure in being an independent woman. She enjoyed several affairs with different men until she finally settled down in 1920. Margaret Drabble, a British novelist, biographer and critic, described Enid as "in her youth, an authentic New Woman of dash and style and speed, determined to carve out her own career as a writer" (par 2). These New Women, according to scholar Andrzej Diniejko, "all called for a redefinition of women's roles in marriage and society, and opposed the social norms imposed on women" (par 13). Drabble continues to explain that Enid "followed closely, too closely in the footsteps of HG Wells's New Woman, Ann Veronica. Ann Veronica had appeared in 1909, when Enid was 20. She studied her, overtook her, and plunged boldly onward" (par 3). Enid was no longer only the high-spirited young lady who loved to write, but due to the people she met in her life she became a New Woman: a woman who wanted to change the lives of women in her time and make them independent identities rather than married women conforming to marital expectations. Being this New Woman, Enid retained her maiden name for her writing career in order to make her own independent fame rather than gaining it with the last name of her spouse. She might have been a married woman, but she was not controlled by her husband. She made her own choices and worked hard for her necessities and desires in life. About the art of writing itself she said:

Who wants to become a writer? And why? ... It's the streaming reason for living. To note, to pin down, to build up, to create, to be astonished at nothing, to cherish the oddities, to let nothing go down the drain, to make something, to make a great flower of life, even if it's a cactus. (qtd. in *The Journey is Everything: A Journal of the Seventies* 50)

She saw writing as a means to convey her ideologies and to put her views of life on paper. By doing so, she tried to give other women the strength to fight for their own independence as well. *Diary without Dates* was a daring publication, because it put VAD life in a light in which it was never seen before. She chronicled her own feelings and then published them for the world to see, in order to initiate a change. Later in life she continued to write *The Squire* which explores the different aspects of being a woman and what those aspects mean. Therefore there can be no doubt that Enid was a New Woman. She wrote in order to make a change in the world and in order to give people a different look what being a woman actually entails. She has used her life work in order to accomplish this. Being a New Woman is therefore a very important part in Enid Bagnold's life and also very much related to her sense of inferiority, of being overshadowed by the soldiers.

Vera always had plans to study in Oxford as soon as she finished her education at St Monica's, but at that point higher education for women was highly exceptional and it was another expense her father was at first not willing to make. As Berry and Bostridge explain: "Vera never seems to have shown the slightest inclination to go anywhere but Oxford" (47) but "running to as much as £35 a term, Mr Brittain may have balked at what he saw as an unnecessary additional expense" (47). They eventually agreed on an extra semester at St Monica's, but after that she was to return to Buxton and preferably find a husband. Vera detested the idea of going back to Buxton, as well as finding a man suitable to marry her. She explains:

From what I already knew of men, it seemed only too probable that a husband would yet further limit my opportunities - a conclusion fully warranted by the fact that nearly all the men I knew not only lived in Buxton, but regarded it as the most desirable place of residence in England. (Brittain 42)

She did not want to be repressed by another man, as her father was already declining her idea of attending University in Oxford and she fully intended not to stay in Buxton the rest of her life as it was a place in which she "felt trammelled and trapped" (Brittain 42). In her mind, this was an inevitable certainty if she were to marry a Buxton man. Edward, on the other hand, had always been expected to attend college. However much she loved her brother, she could not help but feel envious of him for the chances she initially did not get. She wrote: "I loved him too dearly even while he was still at school to be jealous of him personally, particularly as he

was always my gallant supporter, but I should have been far more patient and docile than I ever showed any symptom of becoming if I had not resented his privileged position as a boy” (Brittain 45). Vera almost gave up hope on ever getting the education she so desperately wanted, but in early 1913 a well-respected family friend visited the family and coaxed her father into the idea of Vera attending University at Oxford. Soon after that Sir John Marriott came to Buxton to give lectures in the Town Hall. Eventually he even moved Vera to speak up about her longing to attend Oxford and ask his advice. He advised her to enter an essay competition, which she won. Eventually Vera’s father told her:

He had decided to send me to Oxford for a year, and did not seem unduly disconcerted when I returned home with the information - then as much news to me as to him - that if I wanted a Degree I must remain at college not merely for one year but for three. (Brittain 47-48)

Despite the fact that her father initially did not want her to go to Oxford she finally got what she wanted due to her strong-willed character. It seems as though the fact that she felt inferior towards the male figures in her life just inspired her obstinacy and her will to fight for her desires. Vera’s first encounter with Oxford admissions, however, did not go well, as she had not been taught the necessary courses during her education. This made her slightly anxious, but when she had thought about it and had discussed it with her brother she was more determined than ever to prove that she could do it and set about it following the most difficult course of action. About this she said: “I had been rash enough to select the college with the highest standard of scholarship; I might as well be a little more foolish, and attempt to enter it by the most resistant of doors” (Brittain 51). Despite being the strong-minded woman she had always been, these obstacles exhibit how much willpower she had and how far determination brought her in life. She was resolute in showing everyone around her that she was able to attend college and to demonstrate that being a woman was no setback for her at all. Not only was she purposeful, she in fact welcomed the difficulties. She stated: “To have some real work to do after more than a year of purposeless pottering was like a bracing visit to a cliff-bound coast after lethargic existence on a marshy lowland” (Brittain 51).

Looking at the early lives of Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold we notice that although their upbringing and early education differ greatly from each other, one growing up in a wealthy and steady home, the other growing up in many places, both women have some noteworthy similarities as well. Both women suffered patriarchal interference, which was a usual

occurrence in that time, but resisted this avidly as they felt that they should be able to do as they desired. Upon receiving their education this sense was strengthened for both women as they met someone who introduced them to feminist ideas, which led them to work even harder in order to reach their desired goals and stand up to the patriarchal society that was theirs at that moment in time. Both women also objected to getting married immediately after school, but dealt with this in a different manner. Enid revelled in her sexuality and in being an independent woman before settling down with a husband who did not tie her down, but gave her the freedom she required. She continued to carve out her own career as a writer and in the process of this all became a New Woman: she wanted to change the world in any way she could. Vera fought for her place at Oxford University, which was also, at that time, an unusual place to be for a woman. This chapter ultimately shows that even before the war, both women had issues with patriarchal figures as well as with being a woman in the patriarchal society they lived in, but due to their determination they fought for what they aspired and eventually got to where they wanted to be. The next chapter will deal with their lives during the war and the heightening of their sense of female inferiority.

Chapter 3

The influence of the war

When the war erupted something changed significantly for both women. They had been struggling with their position as women for some time before, but as the war broke out their sense of inferiority with regard to men grew only stronger. Both women felt the need to make themselves useful and wanted to contribute to the war efforts as much as the men, but found that they were not able to do so. In order to deal with these feelings both women decided to join the predominant employment of women during the First World War: they joined the VAD. As Vera and Enid were both very different women, this had a different impact on each of them.

Before the war erupted, Vera had met Roland Leighton with whom she had developed a loving relationship over time. At one point she wrote in her diary:

I would be satisfied with nothing less than a mutually comprehensive loving companionship. I could not endure to be constantly propitiating any man, or to have a large range of subjects on which it was quite impossible to talk to him.
(Brittain 72)

Roland seemed to be of the same level of intellect as Vera was, regarding the conversations they shared on topics like religion, immortality and literature as well as their love for poetry. Roland was not only Vera's intellectual equal, he also originated from a family of writers. Both his mother and his father were writers, and they both had been earning a living with their work. Mark Bostridge explains that "his mother wrote popular romances, serialised in the Northcliffe Press, and collaborated on works of detective fiction with her husband" (21). According to Vera, "Roland told me how he had himself been a feminist ever since he discovered that his mother's work as well as his father's had paid for his education and their household expenses" (Brittain 61). This meant that Roland understood the same values as Vera did, which attracted her even more to him. According to Bostridge "the entire household revolved around his mother's writing, as his father's earned much less" (21-22). Not only did his mother earn a living with her writing, she also upstaged her husband. Marie Leighton however was not actually a feminist, as Bostridge states that "she liked tidy, conventional, romantic endings, and said that she would have been happy to be kept a woman if only her husband's income had permitted" (22). This goes to show that Vera values her intellect and interest in female equality even in her relationships.

When the war broke out in August 1914 her brother, Edward, and Roland both expressed interest in joining the armed forces. When Roland received news that he had a possibility of enlisting he wrote to Vera:

I don't think in the circumstances I could easily bring myself to endure a secluded life of scholastic vegetation. 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. (Brittain 72)

This seemed difficult to hear for Vera as she wrote back:

Women get all the dreariness of war, and none of its exhilaration. This, which you say is the only thing that counts at present, is the one field in which women have made no progress - perhaps never will (though Olive Schreiner thinks differently). I sometimes feel that work at Oxford, which will only bear fruit in the future and lacks the stimulus of direct connection with the War, will require a restraint I am scarcely capable of. (Brittain 72-73)

At this point Vera's already growing feminist beliefs start to culminate in her feelings of inferiority towards men. Men are able to fight in the war, whereas women are not allowed to follow. She felt that women got all the dreariness of war, because they were not able to partake and quite possibly never would be able to. Women had been making such progress in the past years, herself included as she had fought for her position at Oxford University, but the war renewed her sense of female inferiority. She wrote: "Obviously I was suffering, like so many women in 1914, from an inferiority complex" (Brittain 73). The moment Roland actually left for the front was when life became exceptionally difficult for Vera. She wanted to be able to contribute to the war efforts and to see Roland back in one piece, but she realised that all she could do at the time was wait. She explains: "'I suppose he is right,' I argued with myself, 'and the only thing, which is the hardest thing, is to work and wait - and certainly to hope, which one must do or die'" (Brittain 92). She furthermore recalls: "How fortunate we were who still had hope, I did not then realise; I could not know how soon the time would come when we should have no more hope, and yet be unable to die" (Brittain 92). At the time she felt helpless, but in retrospect they still had hope, which was still a positive influence on life. When hope was lost life became arduous.

As the war raged on Vera started to feel that Roland's remark on University being "a secluded life of scholastic vegetation" might be more accurate than she had originally thought. She felt studying was too temperate a job and she needed to make herself useful. She wanted to actually do something which called for a more physical approach. She explained it as follows:

So closely, at this stage, was active war-work of every type associated in the public mind with the patriotic impulse which sent men into the Army that I never dreamed, amid all my analytical speculations, of inquiring whether 'joining up' would not be, for me, a mere emotional antidote involving no real sacrifice. (Brittain 94)

Her first real wartime efforts eventually became mending holes in socks for the soldiers, which made her feel one small step closer to Roland and the War. In reality however, it was more of an emotional escape, lessening her sense of futility. As days passed, usual things of life became a torment:

The clock, marking off each hour of dread, struck into the immobility of tension with the shattering effect of a thunderclap. Every ring at the door suggested a telegram, every telephone call a long-distance message giving bad news (Brittain 95).

Her anxiety kept growing as the days progressed and she felt that she needed a drastic change in her life in order to cope with these feelings as she writes:

I only know that such an anguish could never be conquered in a life of scholastic endeavour . . . never among those indifferent, unperceiving college women for the majority of whom war and love and grief might not exist. The ability to endure these things would come back in time, but only after some drastic change. (Brittain 93)

It appears as though she felt that the women in college, who she describes as "indifferent, unperceiving college women", would not be able to share her senses of futility, which eventually led her to make drastic changes in her life. So she resolved to take up nursing with

the hopes of being able to get a year off from Somerville to work in a hospital in order to be there when Roland arrives home, wounded or on leave.

Her life revolved around Roland's enlistment, therefore she tried to contribute in the ways she could in order to feel useful. In her diary she writes: "He has to face far worse things than any sight or act I could come across; he can bear it – and so can I" (Brittain 102). On 27 June 1915 "she started work as an unpaid auxiliary Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse at Buxton's Devonshire Hospital" (Bostridge 36). With the arrival of a new Head Sister only a month after Vera started her work as a VAD she started asking herself "What do I think about when I am doing my work at the hospital?" and came to the conclusion that the answer was: 'Nothing whatever, except the thing that I am going to do next'" (Brittain 113). It seems as if her hard work as a VAD has brought her the tranquillity that she had been searching for ever since Roland had joined the War. As she continued her work as a VAD she was mostly preoccupied, but there were still times she felt "miserably conscious that, apart from the demand for doctors and nurses, women in war seemed to be at a discount except as the appendages of soldiers" (Brittain 127). So joining the VAD made her feel useful in some ways, as the hard work gave her the peace of mind she required, but it also strengthened her sentiments that that was the only contribution women could make to the war efforts.

As for Enid, her reason to join the VAD is not as extensive as Vera's reason seems to be. On his website Spartacus Educational, John Simkin writes that "on the outbreak of the First World War Enid joined the Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) and worked as a nurse at the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich" (Simkin *Enid Bagnold*). She had always been an independent woman who wanted to make herself useful and joined the VAD as a result of that. It should be stated that working as a VAD was not a task to be taken lightly. As Samuel Hynes describes in his book *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*:

Clearly it was intensely painful to work among wounded, suffering men; but it was also, it seems, frustrating. The impression that one gets from women's accounts is of self-doubt and self-denigration, of being women who can't do what trained nurses can do, and who feel inferior to men because they can't be *in* the war as men can. (138)

Hynes describes the work as "intensely painful" and "frustrating" which is also how *Diary without Dates* describes the profession. The VADs had to nurse the fallen and wounded soldiers back to health as well as they possibly could. This was challenging as the men they treated were

suffering a great deal, which is difficult to handle in an unemotional manner. Furthermore, not being able to do as much as the Sisters could, let alone being able to be in the War as men were was extremely frustrating, especially to Enid. She tried to do the best she could, but she always had to comply with and aid others. She felt the work she did would never be comparable to the work the men and Sisters did.

Complying to orders from the Sisters, VADs were also not allowed to get close to their patients nor were they allowed to give them any extra care than that which they essentially needed.

Facing me a pair of blue eyes were bulging above an open mouth, the nostrils were quivering, the fingers were wrung together. It was Gayner, surely seeing a ghost. I rose and went to his bed. "My jaws want to close," he muttered. "I can't keep them open." I jumped and went for Sister, who took the news in a leisurely fashion, which reproved me for my excitement. Feeling a fool, I went and sat down again, taking up my splint. But there was no forgetting Gayner. (Bagnold 62)

She says she "jumped and went for a Sister", meaning she felt a strong urge to aid this man, but when she was reprimanded by the Sister she felt "a fool". She was forced to continue her splinting, but she says she could not forget about it. This passage gives the impression that she feels wrong about not doing anything and frustrated about the reply of the Sister to her request. Enid continues to recount "So, forbidden to speak to him, I finished my splint till tea-time. But I couldn't bring myself to sit down to it, for fear that the too placid resumption of my duties should outrage him. I stood up. Which helped me, not him" (Bagnold 63). All she could do was to obey and make herself as comfortable about that as she could, clearly explaining "which helped me, not him" (63). There was, frustratingly, nothing she could do for him as she was not allowed to, so the only thing left to do was trying to make herself feel better about it.

Enid did not only feel inferior to the Sisters, but during the course of her work as a VAD she started to feel the same way towards the soldiers she had to aid. She saw the torment the soldiers had to endure and felt slightly ashamed of being the one who had to be strong and caring. She writes:

Pain.... To stand up straight on one's feet, strong, easy, without the surging of any physical sensation, by a bedside whose coverings are flung here and there

by the quivering nerves beneath it ... there is a sort of shame in such strength.
(Bagnold 18)

She describes her work as “easy” and “without the surging of any physical sensation” (18) in contrast to the men that are on the bed. The men were the ones who had to bear all the hardships while she merely stood there trying to ease their pain. The fact that she describes it as such adds to her sense of inferiority, as her work is not as torturous as theirs was. She has to be strong for the men, but her keeping strength is simpler for her as her job is easier. As she says “there is a sort of shame in such strength” and she feels that hers is not as real as the strength the men have.

We have seen that Vera’s correspondence with Roland fuelled her sense of inferiority as he expressed his feelings towards his studies as opposed to the war. This consequently made Vera feel inferior and inutile towards men which caused her to make herself useful in order to prove that women could also be a valuable asset to the war. For this reason she joined the VAD and this is also the reason it started out giving her solace. However, it also made it painfully clear to her that that was the only contribution women could make to the war efforts and that men had it far worse. Enid’s reason for joining the VAD was slightly different as it was not in order to feel closer to her boyfriend or brother, but solely to give herself the impression that she was making herself useful. It did not exactly offer her the tranquillity it gave Vera, for she explains that the work made her feel frustrated as she would always feel inferior to either the men or the Sisters she had to work for. She did, however, share the sentiment that however difficult she may have felt her work was, the men always had to endure even worse.

Both women also suffered great trauma during the war. For Vera this trauma was chiefly caused by the loss of her loved ones, but also by continuing her work as a VAD. From October 18th 1915 she had to report for duty in London, where she had to work in an overcrowded hospital with seriously injured young men, which she found traumatic. Then came the news that Roland had deceased. He died from injuries after being shot by a sniper. Edward had been called to the front as well at that time, so she has been corresponding with him more often. Bostridge states that “On the 1st of July 1916 Edward had lead his company in the first wave of the attack that was to go down in history as one of the most terrible days of slaughter in the history of the British Army” (Bostridge 50). Edward had led his company into the Battle of the Somme. Upon hearing this, Vera has regained new insights in the efforts of war. She was filled with pride for her brother. Even though she previously felt that working in the hospital in London was a traumatic experience, this news gave her a new sense of power and value.

Bostridge explains it as follows: “Roland’s death had confirmed him in Vera’s eyes as the embodiment of the ideal of ‘heroism in the abstract’” (Bostridge 51). Now Edward’s bravery on the Somme provided her with another personal example of heroism and self-sacrifice. After the death of Roland, which was a horrendous experience, it seems as though she needed to hear about her brother’s feat as a soldier as this not only strengthened her as a person, but it also strengthened her sentiments of female empowerment as it made her regain the energy she needed to continue her work and be of use again.

As Vera contemplated foreign service, she wrote that she would strive to live by such values – and if necessary to die by them as well” (Bostridge 51). In September of that year she went to serve as a VAD in Malta. Serving as a VAD there differed greatly from serving in London, as they were given more liberties there. “In nearly all the blocks the VAD was left on duty alone - a responsibility never permitted her at the 1st London General - for either the afternoon or the evening, and was often in charge of over a hundred patients” (Brittain 191). This gave Vera more of a sense of accomplishment as serving in London did, which was a great necessity for her at the time. While serving in Malta however, Vera received news that one of her friends had been injured and that another one of her friends had perished. She briefly returned home after this, but after discovering her injured friend died as well Vera and Edward’s attachment grew even greater, being all they had left. Within weeks Vera had “returned to the VAD headquarters at Devonshire House to request a posting on the Western Front to be near Edward, and to fulfil her own ‘small, weary part in this War’ to the bitter end” (Bostridge 56). So the bad news of her friends reared her back into her sense of inferiority as it made her feel useless again. As per her own request she was sent to France. According to Bostridge:

Etaples was to be the climax of Vera’s nursing experience, representing real active service conditions at last. . . . Everything of war that one can imagine is here, except actual fighting, & one can even hear the distant rumble of that at times. (57)

It was also there that Vera found that she was unable to feel any antipathy towards the German soldiers she had to treat as they too were only humans. As time passed, she and Edward went on leave simultaneously for a final time. When he returned to battle he was back at the front and in imminent danger. On June 15th Edward was killed in action in Italy. After that Vera had lost all sense of positivity towards the future and her once so strong-willed plans. She writes:

The poor surviving remnants of the writer's career that I once prepared for so fiercely would vanish into limbo with the men whom I had loved. My only hope now was to become the complete automaton, working mechanically and no longer even pretending to be animated by ideals. (Brittain 274)

The loss of her beloved friends and brother had had such an impact on her that it seems as though her entire personality had changed. She went from a high-spirited and highly obstinate young woman to a shell of her former self. She even felt the need to cease writing, which was something that had always been her escape.

As opposed to Vera, Enid did not lose anyone particularly close to her, but she, too, felt the trauma of her work as a VAD. She felt that the nurses did not treat the patients as properly as they should which at times frustrated her, but she also felt the horror of the work itself. *Diary without Dates* has passages explaining "I am alive, delirious, but not happy. I am at any one's mercy; I have lost thirty friends in a day. The thirty-first is in bed No. 11" (44), and "Can one grow used to death? It is unsafe to think of this.... For if death becomes cheap it is the watcher, not the dying, who is poisoned" (49). She had seen so much death and pain that it was undoubtedly going to have a traumatising effect. Her sense of shame was fuelled even more at times when the ward was almost vacant. She writes:

When the ward is empty and there is, as now, so little work to do, how we, the women, watch each other over the heads of the men! And because we do not care to watch, nor are much satisfied with what we see, we want more work. At what a price we shall get it..... (Bagnold 67)

She explicitly refers to herself and the other VADs and sisters as "the women", to emphasise that they were not men. She felt that men would be able to deal with the pain on a more intimate level as lesser patients meant more personal care. "The women" found this difficult to deal with as they were not as strong and even in a sense hoped for more patients in order to keep their courage. In a way, they needed men to retain their own strength. Also, from their point of view as women and nurses, Enid also felt that they should never judge the men's suffering as they were not the ones who had to undergo it. In one passage to a Sister she writes: "'Oh, hush, hush!' my heart cried soundlessly to her, 'You can't judge the bitterness of this, nun, from your convent...!'" (Bagnold 30). From where the nurses stood and lived, they could never feel the same way the soldiers did after living the horrors of war. Similarly they could

never experience pain the way the soldiers did either. So not only the fact that she had to witness so many horrors in her ward, the fact that she felt useless when she did not also contributed to her sense of trauma.

For Vera the end of the war was by no means something she welcomed. With the end of the war came the realisation that she would not be able to share this new period with any of her friends.

For the first time I realised, with all that full realisation meant, how completely everything that had hitherto made up my life had vanished with Edward and Roland, with Victor and Geoffrey. The War was over; a new age was beginning; but the dead were dead and would never return. (Brittain 281)

After this realisation Vera needed to plan ahead. She writes:

I was making up my mind to go back to Oxford - not because I particularly wanted to go back, for I was not conscious of wanting to do anything, but because college seemed the one thing left out of the utter wreckage of the past, and I had a prejudice against leaving unfinished something that I had begun. (Brittain 284)

So she would ultimately return to Oxford to finish college, not because she really wanted to anymore, but because she felt she had to finish what she had started. While at university she began to think about a way to give her life meaning again. Finally she concluded:

I don't know yet what I can do, I concluded, to help all this to happen, but at least I can begin by trying to understand where humanity failed and civilisation went wrong. If only I and a few other people succeed in this, it may be worth while that our lives have been lived; it may even be worth while that the lives of the others have been laid down. Perhaps that's really why, when they died, I was left behind. (Brittain 286)

She had returned from the war alone, for she had lost everyone she cared for. She felt that if anything, people should learn from the past mistakes and she wanted to make sure that people would learn through her. It seems as though the finality of war had made her realise that it hot

not all been in vain and that she needed to make her life worthwhile in order to pay respects to everybody she lost.

In 1920 she became close friends with Winifred Holtby, which made her feel less alone and eventually sparked her feminist side again. She had written an article for the *Oxford Chronicle* 'The Point of View of a Woman Student', which resulted in the editor of the newspaper asking her to write a weekly column about that subject. Upon hearing this, Vera sent a letter to her mother: "I may make a little money, ... 'unless the Principals of the women's colleges interfere; I hear they are afraid of topical articles for fear anything will reflect on them'" (Brittain 302). She was proud to have been asked to do so and was willing to write the truth. When in 1921 Vera and Winifred both graduated they wanted to become successful as writers. Winifred had gained success with two novels whereas "Vera had more success with her journalism and in 1920s wrote for the feminist journal, *Time and Tide*. Vera also published two books on the role of women, *Women's Work in Modern Britain* (1928) and *Halcyon or the Future of Monogamy* (1929)" (Simkin, "Vera Brittain"). Her most popular work would eventually be her autobiography *Testament of Youth*. Regarding the things she accomplished in the presence of Winifred, it can be said that Winifred had played a great part in Vera's so called recovery. Her realisation that she needed to live her life for the men she lost combined with her friendship with Winifred returned Vera to her old feminist self. Feminist ideas and writing became a substantial part of her life again, and she even turned the latter into a profession.

The preeminent way for Enid to deal with her inferiority complex was ultimately publishing *Diary without Dates* to show the world what life as a VAD was really like and to hopefully bring about some sort of change. It was all she could do from her perspective and it was a bold move which eventually cost her job. When she lost her job she relocated to France to become an ambulance driver during the rest of the war. As has been mentioned already in chapter two, Enid continued to enjoy being an independent woman after the war and has enjoyed the company of numerous intellectual people before settling down. Like Vera she continued writing afterwards and she went on to become a well-known writer by her own decree. Being the New Woman that she was, she wanted to contribute to society by using her writing and make a change in the world as well. This is eventually what she did.

Both women had ostensibly different reasons for joining the VAD, because Vera joined to feel closer to Roland primarily, but ultimately they both entered life as a VAD because they wanted to contribute to the war efforts in their own way. For Vera this started out to be fulfilling as the work made her forget her troubles, whereas for Enid this was only cause for more

irritation and her sense of inferiority grew not only towards men, but also towards the nurses. Vera's feelings towards her work were closely knitted with what was happening to her loved ones, which meant that these changed a lot over the course of the work. Enid turned her time as a VAD into a judgemental observation for the public by publishing her diary covering that period in her life and continued to work as an ambulance driver for the duration of the war. Vera used her diary of that period, along with the letters she wrote and received from her loved ones to eternalise their lives on paper as she had lost them all. For both women this brought them solace in their resentment towards their female inferiority complex as well as that it helped them cope with the horrors of the war. They had accomplished something that could possibly bring about change in society and they did so by using a means they had a passion for since the beginning of their lives.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to agree with the statement that Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold demonstrated their sense of female inferiority and their method of dealing with that particular sentiment in their memoirs *Testament of Youth* and *Diary without Dates*, by revealing that the best manner of dealing with this was by contributing to society as best as they could.

The female inferiority complex was indeed an issue some women had struggled with during the First World War as both Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold have shown through their written confessions. Both women had displayed feminist sentiments from an early age as well as an already slight sense of inferiority towards the male figures in their lives. For both women the war sparked their sense of inferiority towards men in general as it aroused a sense of uselessness in them. In order to try and cope with these emotions, both Vera and Enid joined the VAD seeing it as a manner of escaping their thoughts as well as making themselves feel useful. Another striking similarity in both women is the fact that writing had played a great part in their lives. They both kept a diary during the war and used that to confide in and put their feelings to paper and writing eventually became their profession.

Aside from these many similarities, both women were in a way also completely different. As working as a VAD and writing were not enough to cope with their female inferiority complex, both women needed another mechanism to find their feminist side back. For Vera Brittain it was the realisation that she needed to make the most of her life, because her lost ones could not anymore as well as befriending Winifred Holtby, who shared her feminist beliefs. Her friendship with Winifred was the reason she picked up writing again, which led to her eventually getting her work published. *Testament of Youth* is, as the name itself already suggests, a testament to her youth and the people she had cared for in that time. It was written as a homage to her friends and her brother.

Enid Bagnold did not need the realisation of her lost loved ones or a new friendship to accomplish something great. For her the urge to make a change was so great, she decided to get her diary about her work as a VAD published. As the journal contained her unvarnished personal thoughts as well as her experiences as a VAD this was quite unusual. She lost her job over it, but *Diary without Dates* effectively made a huge impact on the public at the time.

The overall conclusion is that some women really suffered from a female inferiority complex inflicted by the war. The war allowed women some emancipation, albeit only for the duration of the war, but that did not take away their belief of men being superior to women. This thesis ultimately has proven that Vera Brittain and Enid Bagnold use their VAD work as a means of escaping as well as dealing with their inferiority complex, but has to conclude that

it is not that simple. Contributing to society was a manner of escaping these inferior feelings for some, but for women like Vera and Enid this was not enough. These women had to discover who they were independently and find a way to reveal this to the world in order to overcome their female inferiority complex. For Vera this also meant keeping a diary and retaining her feminist values as well as eventually publishing her autobiography, whereas for Enid this also meant provoking the status quo by publishing her sentiments in a time in which this was unconventional. The war was a difficult time for both women, which made them face the extremely difficult challenge of dealing with their inferiority, but it also led them into making the impact on the world they always longed to.

Works Cited

- Adie, Kate. "What Did World War One Really Do for Women?" *BBC*. BBC, n.d. Web. 3 May 2016.
- Airth-Kindree, Anne Victoria Margaret. *Munitionettes: British Women in Munitions during the First World War*. N.p.: n.p., 1987. Print.
- Bagnold, Enid. *A Diary without Dates*. N.p.: Project Gutenberg, 2010. EPub.
- Baker, Chris. "Was My Soldier in 'Kitchener's Army'?" *Kitchener's Army 1914-1918*. Long, Long Trail, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.
- Barlow, Adrian. "Women Writers and the War 1914-16." *The Great War in British Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 26-27. Print.
- Berry, Paul, and Mark Bostridge. *Vera Brittain: A Life*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1995. Print.
- Bevington, Helen. "1971." *The Journey Is Everything: A Journal of the Seventies*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1983. 50. *Google Books*. Web. 1 Aug. 2016.
- Bostridge, Mark. *Vera Brittain and the First World War: The Story of Testament of Youth*. London: Bloomsbury, n.d. Print.
- Brittain, Vera. *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*. New York: Macmillan, 1933. Print.
- Diniejkó, Andrzej. "The New Woman Fiction." *The New Woman Fiction*. Victorian Web, 17 Dec. 2011. Web. 05 June 2016.
- Drabble, Margaret. "Upstairs, Downstairs." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 30 May 2008. Web. 05 June 2016.
- Ferguson, Norman. "1914." *The First World War: A Miscellany*. N.p.: Summersdale, 2014. 14. *Google Books*. Web. 24 May 2016.
- Grayzel, Suzan R. "Changing Lives: Gender Expectations and Roles during and after World

- War One." *British Library*. British Library, n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.
- Goodings, Lennie. "About Virago." *Virago Press*. Themoholics, 2012. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.
- Hamilton, Cicely. "Non-Combatant." *Allpoetry.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Mar. 2016.
- Hynes, Samuel. "The Lights Go Out: 1914-1915." *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. N.p.: Random House, n.d. 138. *Google Books*. Random House. Web. 7 Mar. 2016.
- James, Elizabeth. "Images of the Victorian Book: Yellowbacks." *British Library*. British Library, n.d. Web. 26 May 2016.
- Kingsley Kent, Susan. "The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism." *Journal of British Studies* 27.3 (1988): 232-33. *JSTOR [JSTOR]*. Web. 4 Aug. 2016.
- Kitchener, Horatio. *Your King and Country Need You - A Call to Arms*. Digital image. *Your King and Country Need You - A Call to Arms*. Imperial War Museum, n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2016.
- Nursing during the First World War*. N.p.: British Red Cross, 2016. PDF.
- Patterson, Celia. "Women Writers of World War I." *From McFarlin Tower*. University of Tulsa, 11 Oct. 2010. Web. 24 Mar. 2016.
- Sebba, Anne. *Enid Bagnold: The Authorized Biography*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986. Print.
- Simkin, John. "Dorothea Beale." *Spartacus Educational*. Spartacus Educational Publishers Ltd., 15 Jan. 2015. Web. 26 May 2016.
- . "Enid Bagnold." *Spartacus Educational*. Spartacus Educational Publishers Ltd., Jan. 2015. Web. 05 June 2016.
- . "Vera Brittain." *Spartacus Educational*. Spartacus Educational Publishers Ltd., n.d. Web. 26 May 2016.

---. "Voluntary Aid Detachment." *Spartacus Educational*. Spartacus Educational Publishers Ltd., Sept. 1997. Web. 03 May 2016.

Strachan, Hew. "World War One: The Global Conflict That Defined a Century." *BBC iWonder*. BBC, n.d. Web. 13 June 2016.

"Women's Involvement with the British Red Cross during the First World War." *Redcross*. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 May 2016.

"What Was It like in Towns and Rural Areas?" *BBC News*. BBC, 11 Apr. 2014. Web. 9 Mar. 2016.