

# Writing an Autobiographical Novel

## Recovery from War Experience in Vera Brittain's *The Dark Tide*

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### Introduction

This paper discusses Vera Brittain's *The Dark Tide* (1923) in order to show how the novel dramatizes the process of the author's recovery from her experiences of the First World War. This autobiographical novel comprises two periods in the life of its female protagonists: the portrayal of their student days in a women's college at Oxford in 1920, and life after graduation through marriage, childbirth and work. The two protagonists and the circumstances of their lives are based on Brittain's actual experiences after the First World War. The novel begins with their return to college. The author, Vera Brittain (1893-1970), also engaged in the war effort as part of the VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) and belonged to the first generation of women to be conferred a degree at Oxford. However, the novel has been fiercely criticized for misrepresenting the life of female students at Oxford who lived there in 1923. The reason is ascribed to the ambiguity of the autobiographic novel, which takes the form of fiction but may also be read as an autobiography.

In this paper, I would like to investigate the author's writing strategy by examining four fictional segments of the novel: first, the fictional aspects of Chapter III that are, nevertheless, based on Brittain's own experiences in the school debate; second, the fictional features of the characters and portrayal of the women's college; thirdly, the scene of the reunion and Brittain's traumatic hallucinations; finally, the fabrication of Daphne's disabled child and divorce in real law and

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Christianity. These four aspects contain both self-denial and self-criticism with regard to the autobiographical part. The novel was written after the war, while Brittain was recovering from traumatic hallucinations she suffered from 1919 to 1921. By focusing on these tensions between the fictional and autobiographical elements, this paper seeks to explore the author's process of recovery from the war experience as representative of the experience of educated women who grew up in the late nineteenth century.

### **The Fiction in an Autobiographic Novel**

In *The Dark Tide*, Daphne Lethbridge returns from war service in Portsmouth where she was a driver to one of Oxford's women's colleges, Drayton. Tutoring with Mr Stephanoff, she meets Virginia Dennison, who had worked in military hospitals in France as part of the VAD, and becomes her rival in love. Later, she falls in love with Raymond Sylvester, a lecturer of political science, and marries him after Virginia refuses his proposal for marriage. However, Raymond still loves Virginia. After their honeymoon in Italy, he begins to have an affair while Daphne is pregnant with his child. One day, Raymond pushes Daphne's pregnant body in a quarrel, disabling the child, and leaves her alone and travels to the Far East as a secretaryship with his mistress, Lucia. A year later, Raymond returns to London to run for election in the city of Ellswich. As Daphne waits for him in the flat, Raymond's mistress comes to persuade her not to divorce him because to do so would seriously damage his political career as Ellswich is an anti-divorce, Cathedral town. Daphne forgives Raymond's abandonment of her and their disabled child in hope that he will become British Minister of Arbitration, who is tasked with maintaining peace.

The representation of Daphne as servile to men aroused great debate about this book in newspapers and Oxford's women's colleges.

According to *Vera Brittain: A Life*, the *Daily Express* called this novel “an insult to women’s colleges,” and Oxford women were furious at the depictions of Oxford women and their school life (182). On the other hand, several readers alleged that her fictional characters resembled living people, many critics mention the similarities between the protagonists and Brittain’s acquaintances (183). This reason is ascribed to the ambiguity of this novel, which mixes autobiography and fiction. As Brittain herself admits in the preface of the first edition in 1923, Virginia “was intended for a portrait of myself” (xix). However, she recognised several differences between her fictional descriptions and the real situation in women’s colleges at Oxford in 1921 and restated in the second edition in 1935 that Virginia is one of “wish-fulfilment” portraits to compensate for her “failures and humiliations” during her youth (xix).

Here, we have to try to define portrait and autobiographic novel. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Portrait” is related to drawing pictures and is “Something which represents, typifies, or resembles the object described or implied; a type; a likeness” (“Portrait,” def. A.2.fig.a). Max Saunders explained both terms in his comments on “Imaginary Portraits” by Walter Pater (1839-1894):

The *Imaginary Portraits* are rightly described as mixing autobiography and fiction. But their way of mixing them needs to be distinguished from the autobiographical novel, in which a book is presented as fiction, but can be read as, or even proved to be, autobiographical. Pater crosses the boundary in the other direction, offering work in the form of non-fictional biography, which he encourages us to read as fiction, and autobiography. (40)

This quote defines portrait and autobiographic novel as well as two

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different ways of reading books. Autobiographic novel is a form of fiction, but it transforms into an autobiography in the process of reading. On the other hand, portrait is a form of non-fiction that is read as fiction. This is why *The Dark Tide* could be regarded as an autobiographic novel. Previous scholars tended to focus only on the book's autobiographic aspect, comparing its content with the author's three autobiographies, journals and articles, whereas I will focus on the tension between the fictional and autobiographical elements in the novel.

Chapter III, "The Debate," based on Brittain's real experience in Somerville College just after she returned, is important in the novel. This episode is regarded as an autobiographical part because Brittain mentioned this episode again in chapter X of her first autobiography. Here, I will instead emphasise a fictional part of this chapter which comes after the debate scene. Daphne invites Virginia to the Drayton Debating Society to speak on the topic "a life of travel is a better education than a life of academic experience" (29). Virginia speaks of her war experience, but this is Daphne's small trap to humiliate her before the audience. After the debate, Virginia runs out and stands sobbing uncontrollably until her female tutor Patricia O'Neill finds her crying and welcomes her to her room. This female tutor's action is one of Brittain's wish fulfilments because in *Testament of Youth* (1933), she could not "get into bed," "la[id] on the cold floor and wept with childish abandonment" (490) without meeting anyone who consoled her. The tutor consoles Virginia gently and at the same time laments her family's economic situation and her opinion of women in the war:

'You needn't think, all the same, that because I'm satisfied with this job now, it was the one thing I wanted to do these past few years. But my father was a civil servant with a small income, and my mother's had only his pension since he died. And I've

got a small brother and sister whom between us we had to keep at school somehow. How could I have done that on the salary of a nurse or a Government clerk?’ (37)

O’Neill had family members who went to war and she needed to earn money for them during their absence. She comments that “the remnants of the University” like her “would have been glad to go [to war], but they had to finish their training quickly and get a settled, permanent job so as to make money for themselves or other people” (37). The significance of Virginia’s war work is diminished by Daphne’s jealous harassment and rubs salt in the wounds of O’Neill’s economic circumstances.

Brittain’s wish-fulfilment and self-denial via Virginia appears in a novel which includes a sort of satire written by Virginia, *Earth’s Extremity*, which is “about the attitude of some people in a small country town towards the war” (15). Although publishing was a great achievement among college students at that time, O’Neill says of Virginia’s satire that “I had to admire, but didn’t really like [it] because it was unnecessarily cruel” (36). This episode is also based on Brittain’s real experience of publishing a poetry anthology, *Verses of a V.A.D.* (1918). It is obvious that Virginia, sharing certain experiences with Brittain, is a partial portrayal of the author from her Somerville College days in 1920 and that Virginia suffers some disdain and neglect from other characters in this novel. In other words, Brittain represented herself as Virginia with a wish-fulfilment portrait in the autobiographical part and denied herself in the fictional part of this novel. It is only possible to access both figures through the ambiguity of an autobiographic novel, and Brittain severely torments herself through Virginia in the novel.

### **Models and Characters in Women's Colleges**

As previously stated, though Virginia most closely resembles Brittain herself, Daphne Lethbridge as the main character occupies most parts of the novel. Many critics agree that “Daphne is clearly modelled on [Winifred] Holtby” (Zangen 76), Brittain’s best friend and famous author of *South Riding* (1936). In fact, Brittain met Holtby at tutoring, and she was her real opponent in the debate previously mentioned. Deborah Gorham opined that Daphne “is exaggerated to the point of caricature” (48). Daphne is well off and talkative, while Virginia, modelled after Brittain, is intelligent but cynical, has no sense of humour and is a little arrogant. Speaking of whether her characters are caricatures, Brittain remarked in the preface in 1935 that “I still think that ‘The Dark Tide’” “does represent fairly accurately the type of life led by women students in 1920 and the relationships between them” (xviii). Brittain did not satirise her acquaintances and friends but caricatured the kind of women students in her university life.

What is “the type of life led by women students in 1920”? According to Ray Strachey, women’s education in England developed rapidly from the 1870s (246). In Oxford, several lectures were open to women students, and Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Hall were established to house them in 1878 and 1879, respectively. The early administration of both women’s colleges, however, retained the Victorian era’s passive attitude towards women’s education. Strachey pointed out that the first principal of Lady Margaret Hall, Elizabeth Wordsworth (1840-1932), “had very little enthusiasm for “women’s rights,” and was far more interested in religious questions” (257). In Brittain’s historic book, *The Women at Oxford* (1960), Brittain compared the first and the second principals of Somerville College to the third principal, Emily Penrose (1858-1942):

As the first genuine scholar among women principals Miss

Penrose typified the developing mental values of women, and the changing attitudes of men towards them, as the new century progressed. If the transition from Miss Shaw Lefevre to Miss Maitland could be described as ‘lady into woman,’ the change from capable domestic economy to uncompromising intellectual expectations could equally well be summarized as ‘woman into scholar.’ (120)

Emily Penrose governed Somerville College from 1907 to 1926 and dealt with the predicaments under the First World War and the statute admitting women to degree and full membership at Oxford. When Brittain returned from her war service to Somerville College, the school had already changed its purpose from educating a “lady” to nurturing an “educated woman.” On the other hand, Elizabeth Wordsworth, the first principal of Lady Margaret Hall, remained in power for many years until she died in 1932. Her conservative ideal that a woman was “better with the hands than the head, and best of all with the heart” led Lady Margaret Hall to continue to produce ladies even in 1920, the image on the “religious outlook” of the 1880s and 1890s (56). When Brittain returned to Somerville College in 1919, these two archetypes of the ideal women were in conflict.

In the novel, the religious ideal is foisted onto Daphne Lethbridge. In *The Women at Oxford*, she revealed the religious traditions surrounding women’s education and marriage in the late nineteenth century at Oxford. Women’s education in Oxford originated in the religious reform of Oxford university in 1830’s (22).<sup>1</sup> As a result, there were daughters of “The upper clerical range” (25) like Elizabeth Wordsworth, who encouraged the religious ideal of women in the early days. After Oxford abolished the “religious tests” of the Church of England in 1871 (24), male research fellows began to seek permission to marry in their individual colleges, and a small number of upper and

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middle-class female students married them and continued to learn under the supervision of their husbands (45). Daphne embodies the pre-war ideal model for these educated women. Daphne, a god-daughter of the Bursar of Drayton College, marries Raymond Sylvester, who is a professor of political science, later becoming a diplomat's housewife in London. When she falls in love, her true religious character is revealed in her prayer:

‘Oh, Whatever you are and Whoever you are, please give him to me! Don’t—oh, don’t let her have him! She doesn’t love him—she wouldn’t make him happy! But I would live only to bless his life—to serve him—to do whatever he wished me to do to the very end of my days. For I care so much—so much!’ (79)

When she knew that she loved Raymond, Daphne prays to God to give him to her and not to let Virginia have him; she promises to “serve” him. Romanticizing the act of serving and caring for men is common in the pre-war period. In fact, the tutor, Mr Stephanoff, describes Virginia as having lost her illusions, while Daphne is full of them:

‘[Y]ou have not any illusions. But yet even in that you are different. The difference is that you have lost your illusions, whereas I never had any. Your tutor, Miss O’Neill, is like me; she never had any either. Now your friend, Miss Lethbridge, is full of them. She thinks far too kindly of a very wicked world.’ (46)

Raymond’s proposal to Virginia, an intelligent and independent woman, in the next chapter is a rejection of the “far too kindly” woman who is willing to serve her man. The contrast between Daphne’s and Virginia’s “illusions” shows the development of the ideal woman from

the pre-war period to the post-war period. Brittain was strongly influenced by her correspondence with Emily Penrose, who espoused non-traditional education for women; she wrote this about her ideal of women in her diary on 20 November 1914:

I should say she [Miss Hayes Robinson] is very clever indeed & self-reliant, without being either violently original or aggressively independent, & these qualities, together with the characteristic shyness which seems always to be seeking a sympathetic response, would have made her an excellent wife & really the ideal & equal companion of some brilliant man working his way from some obscure beginning to a lofty and responsible position in the world. (Brittain, *Chronicle* 123)

Before Brittain went to the war, she had a desire to be an “excellent wife” and the “equal companion of some brilliant man working his way from some obscure beginning to a lofty and responsible position in the world” as “really the ideal” in her youth. Daphne maintains not only the Victorian female ideal but also Brittain’s innocence from the pre-war period. Virginia experienced a war tragedy in the loss of her fiancé, something she shares with Brittain, while at the same time being admired for education. Both of the protagonists embody the conflict of identity of the student with “lady into woman” and “woman into scholar” transformations as well as the conflict of identity of the author with her pre-war self and post-war self. Oxford students at the time of publication strongly criticised the book. Although Jean E. Kennard pointed out “In Daphne Lethbridge Brittain punished that part of herself still bound by conventional ideas of a woman’s role” (49), I suggest that Brittain revealed two types of ideals of women prevalent in women’s colleges at Oxford in 1920 and projected the conflict between her past and present selves onto her two protagonists, Daphne

and Virginia.

### **Rewriting the Hallucinations as a Modern Woman**

The ideal figure Brittain introduced and wrote about in her diary in 1914 was Daphne's, who was then subverted in the 1923 novel by marriage with Raymond. Although Daphne gives up her academic career and tries to be the ideal wife to Raymond, her obsession to become a good wife annoys him. This is because they have different visions of the ideal wife: Raymond's courtship of Daphne is a form of revenge on Virginia; "he really needed a wife" in his new life as a diplomat in London (87). He demands his wife to run the household and to be an accomplished hostess while Daphne, an educated woman, expects her husband to be an equal companion. Thus, her labor as wife to write "poems and stories" (140) and her "study" of politics (141) are seen as vain efforts by Raymond, who has an affair with Lucia. Daphne could not make productive use of her free time and felt the apathy of a housewife (142). Finally, Daphne makes a last-ditch attempt to regain Raymond's affection through pregnancy, which fails to win him over and even disgusts him (145). Daphne believes marriage and childbirth are more important forms of "knowledge" than intelligence and an academic career because "love and marriage and birth" are "great elemental secrets" (120), and her ideals are undermined by the anti-romance plot via Raymond's patriarchy. During this period, Daphne is reacquainted with Virginia in London, where she spots her in a shop window, as in Brittain's hallucinations.<sup>2</sup>

In this reunion scene, Brittain tried to overcome her war experience by rewriting the hallucinations as Virginia. After the war, Brittain came to see them when she looked at herself in glasses as "symptoms of over-fatigue" and "excessive strain" in war service (*Testament of Youth* 496). During the war, she experienced not only the deaths of her fiancé, brother, and friends but also the nursing

experience near the fierce battlefields in France. They did serious damage as her hallucinations haunted her for over twenty months. However, the descriptions of the hallucinations are fragmentally mentioned in her autobiographies and her novels without the scene. The symptom is “the sinister transformation which seemed, every time I [Brittain] looked in the glass, to be impending in my face,” for example, “developing a beard” and “turning into a witch” (496-97). According to Andrea Peterson, who analyses this description in *Testament of Youth* and Brittain’s sexuality based on Leonardi’s article,<sup>3</sup> these symptoms stem from her war trauma; the “beard” signifies her masculinisation, and the “witch” signifies “a man” rather than “female” (131). However, by viewing the “witch” as ageing and wildness through the war experience, I would argue that Virginia reflected in the window glass and Brittain’s hallucinations are to some extent related to her preoccupation with the image of the 1920s modern women.

Something like the blurring of gender lines that took place during the war continued in the 1920s, as young women of virtually every class—called “flappers,” “boyettes,” “Modern Women,” or “Modern Girls” by society—dressed in boyish fashions, cut their hair short, smoked cigarettes, drove cars, and generally pursued an active, adventurous lifestyle. (Kent 287)

After a four-year war service, from age nineteen to twenty-three, Brittain, upon returning to school, was told in an interview of many “wild young men and women back from the War” by Emily Penrose (*Testament of Youth* 475). Instead of marrying and pursuing an academic career, Brittain also went to war and spent several years in the hospitals and the wards near the battlefields, working as a VAD nurse. She is therefore the embodiment of a new type of women in the

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post-war age. In the duration of her disease from 1919 to 1921, when she had written the original note of the novel, her women's college life can be said to be a recovery period; there is a shift from being a woman serving for male soldiers to being an educated woman in service of her own independence. Indeed, this unexpected reunion in the novel also becomes the trigger for Daphne to escape from the male-controlled world. After the reunion, Virginia, who is studying to become a nurse, finds Daphne unconscious in her flat and saves her from serious injury inflicted by Raymond. During Daphne's recovery, they reconstruct their relationship and attempt to restore their lines of communication. Susan J. Leonardi pointed out that in this process "Daphne does indeed cease to belong to the male world, and she enters a very female one" (*Dangerous by Degrees* 209). In fact, when Raymond went to Japan, O'Neill reappeared to help Daphne and admired her writings, suggesting that she become a writer in her independent life.

However, Daphne cannot be an independent woman like Virginia and O'Neill at all. The cause represented in this reunion scene is illustrated via Daphne's and Virginia's respective perspectives. In this novel, Daphne is the main observer of the relationship with Virginia before the reunion. However, after the moment through the window, the point of view is shifted to Virginia's. This replacement indicates that Daphne and Virginia are each an aspect of one woman, Brittain. In fact, Daphne has usually judged Virginia through her emotions or subjectively, while Virginia has observed Daphne through her intelligence or objectively. The structure is emphasised in Chapter XIV "The Meeting in Oxford Street" depicted their reunion:

Daphne must have gazed into Marshall's window for fully five minutes before she became aware that a girl, whose back was half turned towards her, had been contemplating the evening cloaks for almost as long. The slenderness of form and proudly

poised head were very familiar to Daphne, which was odd, because the girl wore a nurse's uniform, and Daphne knew no one in the nursing profession. It was not until the stranger turned towards another part of the window that Daphne caught a glimpse of her pale face, with its small, sharp features, and recognised Virginia Dennison. (149)

But Virginia had seen her [Daphne's] start and turn away. She had known for some time that Daphne was standing beside her. Looking first at Daphne and then at the little frocks in the window, she drew her own conclusions without much difficulty. (149)

The difference between Daphne's and Virginia's perspectives is whether there is an invisible obstacle. In the former quotation, Daphne's view is reflected Virginia's figure in a window glass; Daphne saw Virginia indirectly through a mirror image. In the latter, Virginia sees Daphne directly and starts observing her because Virginia "drew her own conclusions" that Daphne is pregnant: Virginia directly observed Daphne's face and figure from her professional standpoint as a nurse. Indeed, Virginia once tried to depart "for the contemptuous indifference" towards Daphne at Oxford and felt "an uncomfortable consciousness" when Raymond proposed to Daphne, and then her "professional instinct" as a nurse "reprove[s]" her for departing and leads her to have tea with Daphne (149-50). Virginia directly touches Daphne's arm and sits beside her at "a corner table" in the tea room (151) and, after the accident, Virginia "had scarcely left her [Daphne's] side" (203) to attend to her for three weeks. However, the gentle juxtaposition of the two protagonists transfers to next phase: in Virginia's confession about Raymond's proposal, she "got up from the chair beside Daphne's bed, and going across to the window stood with

her back to the room,” “looking out of the window” (208). The scene where Virginia has her back to Daphne implies their changed roles and that Virginia cannot recognize the “window” glass as an invisible obstacle. Thus, while Virginia joins her nurse training about a week, Daphne returns to a flat in London to wait for her husband instead of living an independent life as a professional woman. Though Virginia succeeds in giving a correct diagnosis and nursing Daphne successfully from a professional standpoint, she fails to educate Daphne as an independent woman. The cause of this failure is also suggested by Daphne instantly viewing her through a “window” glass: from Daphne’s subjective viewpoint, Virginia is an image of modern women in reality and their contraposition through the mirror refraction suggests an invisible obstacle between two protagonists. In this sense, Brittain failed to integrate two types of ideals of women into one figure, representing herself. The replacement of their viewpoints in the reunion nevertheless shows that Daphne and Virginia are each an aspect of herself.

Brittain overcame her sinister hallucinations by rewriting Virginia as a modern woman and by positively accepting her masculinisation and ageing after the war. In fact, her hallucinations were practically gone by June 1921, when she finished writing the original manuscript of the novel (*Testament of Youth* 511). However, though Virginia is a mirror image in Daphne’s view, a window glass exists between them as an invisible obstacle to Daphne’s achievement of independence in the new age. After the accident, though Daphne succeeds in her new woman-ship with Virginia and O’Neill, who help her with her divorce and independence, she returns to the domestic realm in “Victoria Street”—“London is the easiest of places in which to retire from the world” (205). Therefore, Virginia is a modern woman whereas Daphne is a figure of Victorian residue and an abandoned female in the new age who refuses to become a modern woman despite

her transition from the male to the female world.

### **Another Self-Determination as a Religious Woman**

Brittain overcame her transmutation in the post war period by rewriting her hallucinations as a modern woman, Virginia, while depicting Daphne as a religious woman. This is because she suggests that most women were prevented by Christianity from being independent women. In 1923, Brittain wrote “The Whole Duty of Women” in an article in *Time and Tide*:

We are living still under the shadow of an age which made a woman the first servant of her parents, with the usual alternative of standing in the same relation to her husband, and later to her children. (Berry and Bishop 121)

Raymond’s violence gives Daphne a new independent life as a writer, but ironically, she remains serving a man, her disabled son. There are many statements by Daphne in the novel that are about female “guilt” (Zangen 168). According to Michael Oliver, a leading scholar of disability studies in England, “the explanation for the birth of a disabled child will clearly be a medical or scientific one, but that does not mean that some parents may not feel that it is a punishment for some previous sin” (31) and they had been concealed from society by segregation in the family and the institution (35). Eva Feder Kittay, in *Love’s Labor*, also noted a strong mother-child relationship in “the figure of the *Mater Dolorosa* where the suffering of Christ is imaged through the suffering of Mary” (24). The English translation from Latin, “the Lady of Sorrows,” appears when Daphne goes to the famous Cathedral in Milan during their honeymoon (128). Despite the accident caused by Raymond’s violence and immorality, the responsibility of the disabled son was imposed on Daphne, which is emphasised as

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follows: “he was a living regret, the embodiment of her failure” (218), “the tiny, deformed child, crippled by Daphne’s fall” (204). Thus, in her recovery process from the accident, she decided to “re-created” her world: “she must spend the rest of her days in striving to atone to him for the injury which had incapacitated him through no fault of his own” (219). Therefore, according to Kittay, “once a woman has a child,” “she is no longer the individual she was before” (27): “*We Can’t Go Out the Same Door We Came In*” (26).

To go out the door clearly signifies divorce. The responsibility was still imposed mostly on females. According to Lawrence Stone, author of *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987*, “In 1920, as the post-war divorce rate was nearing its peak” (394-95) because of the war, a “large number of lonely wives had committed adultery and set up new households during the long absences of their husbands at the front” and “When their husbands were demobilized and returned home, they discovered what had happened and started divorce proceedings” (394). Here it is important that divorce is triggered by wives’ adultery whereas that of husbands, until 1923, would quite easily result in “an affectionate letter” from their wives (392). The divorce bill in the novel which corrected this gender imbalance is a precursor of the actual bill in 1923. Therefore, along with the imposed responsibility of their disabled child and their divorce, Daphne cannot become completely independent.

Both ideologies of the disabled child and divorce were based on Christianity: the former expresses the parental and child’s immorality while the latter arose from the religious reformation of Henry VIII (1491-1547). For long periods, the divorce law was objected to by the Church of England. However, according to Stone, “the influence and cohesion of the church was declining” from 1906 to 1923, and “the problem of divorce and remarriage began to be seen in purely secular terms, and the interest of the happiness of the individual to take priority

over the alleged stability of society and the interests of the state” by the advancing tide of “secularism and individualism” (391, 396). The divorce bill, the Matrimonial Causes Act 1923, changed this gender imbalance and achieved an “equality of access by wives to divorce on the grounds of the adultery of their husbands” (395-96). Therefore, Raymond’s career and credit in Cathedral town are jeopardised because the responsibility of divorce would fall on him and consequently prevents Daphne’s independence. Lord Wintermere, Minister of Arbitration and Raymond’s boss, forbids Raymond from going through with the divorce in order to win the by-election in Cathedral town and maintain his “old-fashioned” (226) belief:

‘It may be my principal business in life to act as arbiter between the nations, but I cannot make that an excuse for standing aside when the laws of God are set at naught in my own country! Divorce is an evil thing, Sylvester—the ruin of our homes, the worm that gnaws at the heart of our society.’ (224)

Here, religious belief links private problems to political ones through the use of “our homes.” Thus, though Kennard characterised Britain’s language as more religious (44), I suggested that Brittain revealed in the novel how religious ideology is invisible and male-dominated in the laws and politics of the nation. The religious ideology represented an invisible glass to prevent Daphne from being Virginia, a modern woman. In fact, while Daphne as a mother gazes at “the little frocks” (149) for children in department window, she suddenly finds Virginia as modern woman in the refraction. Thus, Brittain depicts Daphne as a religious woman to reveal women’s obstacles through her disabled child and the divorce.

Then there is Brittain’s other form of feminism for these women in post-war period. She was profoundly influenced by *Woman and*

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*Labor* (1911) by Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), which denounced women's "sex-parasitism" (22) without childbirth and recommended that they labor for society and country in the pre-war period (1). However, Brittain experienced the war, saw the young soldiers dying in pursuit of "heroism in the abstract" (*Testament of Youth* 129) and nursed many injured soldiers including her second fiancé, Victor Richardson (1895-1917), who lost his left eye and a part of his head on the battlefield. Brittain had decided to marry him to take care of him, but he passed away (*Testament of Youth* 338-59). Through nursing, she encountered people who needed care and the women who helped them. Brittain visualised these women and disabled people in the novel.

Therefore, I suggest that Brittain overcame the war experience not only as a modern woman but also as a religious woman who grew up in the late nineteenth century. At the end of the novel, Daphne decides to forgive Raymond (251). Atsuko Ueda, who is a pioneer of the analysis of the novel in Japan, revealed this relation between nation and family in the novel's parent-child relationship reading Daphne as a symbol of alienated women, the disabled child as victim of the war, Raymond as politician enacting the war (167, 172). Thus, Daphne forgives Raymond to hold "the peace of the world" (*The Dark Tide* 249). This is a solution which achieves the religious ideals of women. In *Dangerous by Degrees*, Leonardi, referring to educated female writers in Somerville College, "their fictional worlds are riddled with bewildering demands, that when they create female characters . . . behave in contradictory and sometimes outrageous ways" (50). When people cannot achieve their own ideals, they punish themselves with their guilt. Thus, it is necessary for Brittain to punish the main protagonists by imposing various ideals of males, social demands, religious women and modern women to forgive everything. This is a self-determination as a religious woman. Britta Zangen analysed Brittain's feminist journals and articles as based on "self-determination"

(73), a key to resisting Victorian gender norms which viewed women as dependent on their family and parents, and overcoming their “inferiority complex” (42) towards males. Brittain wrote about it for modern women in her journals and, simultaneously, expressed another form of feminism for women suppressed under Christianity in her fictions. The novel is a story of people pursuing an ambiguous ideal imposed by others and failing to achieve it. It is, at the same time, a story of forgiveness and overcoming the repetition of self-criticism as seen in Brittain’s hallucinations. She overcame her war experience with her two protagonists, Daphne and Virginia. Their relationship accomplishes the task of respecting each self-determination in this autobiographic novel.

## **Conclusion**

*The Dark Tide* mediates the interplay between the author’s past and present selves, divided by the First World War, through the two protagonists. By caricaturing the two ideals of women demanded by the women’s colleges and society in her generation and having the two protagonists’ conflict with and understand each other, the novel not only criticizes the conservative ideal of women but also explores measures to reunite both women, modelled on Brittain herself. Their reunion at once succeeds by transferring the religious woman, Daphne, from her husband’s patriarchy to Virginia’s womanhood in the new world. Their reunion scene compensates for the division between Brittain’s two figures by rewriting her hallucinations positively as her wish-fulfilment portrait, Virginia. However, the solidarity of the women fails because Daphne is prevented from escaping the male-controlled world by invisible religious doctrines including male-dominated laws and politics. Thus, Brittain depicted Daphne as a religious woman. In the fiction, she explored her other form of feminism and self-determination: that of a religious woman who could

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not break women's invisible obstacle. Daphne's forgiveness achieves the religious ideal composed of demands on her by males plus the social and religion systems of the late nineteenth century.

Therefore, Brittain overcame her war experience through two protagonists, Daphne and Virginia: her transmutation after the war was rewritten as Virginia the modern woman and her religious guilt are solved by Daphne's forgiveness toward Raymond in the novel. However, when the narrator says "Life was . . . a dark tide, moaning and desolate, going out in storm and rain" (201), it indicates that the war experience caused uncontrollable damage to any person who survived it. Writing an autobiographic novel helped Brittain to forgive herself and healed the sense of guilt which had once made her punish herself. In this sense, the autobiographic novel has an important role in Brittain's overcoming of the war experience.

### **Notes**

1. This religious reform means the Oxford Movement (1833) and the liberal reaction which followed at Oxford University. The movement's purposes are the revival of Catholic doctrine and the observance in the Church of England. After it passed its peak, the liberal reaction linked to the admission of women in the university (*The Women at Oxford* 22-23).
2. The omit of Brittain's hallucinations in her writings is discussed in Andrea Peterson's *Self-portraits: Subjectivity in the Works of Vera Brittain* (131).
3. This is Leonardi's "Brittain's Bread: Transsexual Panic in *Testament of Youth*" (1990).

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