

## *Interview with Danielle Dybbro*

Winner of the 2018 James Madison Award for Excellence in Historical Scholarship

**Q:** What inspired you to write, “*Crossing No Man’s Land: Bridging the Gender Gap of World War I Through the Works of Vera Brittain?*”

**A:** One of the books we read in my World War I class was *Not So Quiet...* by Helen Zenna Smith, which was a semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical feminist novel about female ambulance drivers during the war. War writings from World War I are heavily male, with famous poets and memoirs coming to mind. This new perspective was fascinating and frankly refreshing, and when my professor mentioned that Vera Brittain’s memoir *Testament of Youth* was one of her favorite books she had read, I did some research and thought it would be interesting to do a comparative look at the memoir and Brittain’s letters and diary. I had no idea I would become so enthralled in the topic, and Brittain’s life, that I ended up with a paper nearly 10 pages longer than the minimum requirement, and that was after I decided I needed to stop and turn it in on time.

Additionally, during my research into *Testament of Youth*, I saw that a film version had been recently made, in 2014, for the 100 year anniversary of the start of the war. I always love reading a book and then watching the film adaptation afterwards, so that was also fun. Well, I wouldn’t say ‘fun’ is the right word because World War I is not ‘fun,’ but my reward for finishing the paper was watching the movie.

I liked the idea of juxtaposing No Man’s Land and a female perspective of World War I, since the term No Man’s Land is obviously tied to the male experience, and because this term was coined during World War I for the stretch of land in-between trenches. Also, just because British women did not fight on the battlefield, did not mean they did not experience horrific loss and even shell shock, as is very evident in *Not So Quiet...* and, as explored in my paper, even with Vera Brittain.

**Q:** How do you envision using your degree after graduating with your M.A.? Do you plan on pursuing a PhD?

**A:** Right now I want to do something related to writing. I can see myself teaching community college, or writing/editing for a journal, working in public history, etc. I went back and forth over the last two years of wanting and not wanting to pursue a PhD, and right now I don’t plan on going back to school. But I definitely want to find a job that utilizes my skills and experience that I gained from my M.A.

**Q:** What do you see as some of the biggest obstacles in pursuing a career in history?

**A:** I think a lot of the humanities are struggling to provide careers for their students. Especially in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I live, careers in technology and startups are a big draw for many people and consequently, where a lot of the money is. There doesn’t seem to be as much of a respect for the humanities as something valuable, and we don’t combat this attitude by staying up in our Ivory Tower. I think we really have to think outside of the box in order to have a successful career while still using our skills and knowledge we obtained from doing historical research.

**Q:** Do you feel that your graduate program has prepared you for a modern humanities field, and if so, how?

**A:** I would say so! We had to have a main focus and a secondary focus, but my main focus was more topical than geographical. Because of that, I took a variety of courses with the common link of imperialism. Even now, I'm prepping for final

**Q:** What is your dream job and how do you plan to get it?

**A:** For the last 5 years it's actually been a dream of mine to own an independent bookstore cafe. I was inspired by Trident Booksellers and Brookline Booksmith in Boston, Massachusetts when I was an undergraduate attending school there. I've always loved bookstores and reading, and even now I physically cannot restrain myself from buying a book if I walk into a bookstore. I plan on working for a little while with a good-paying full-time job before I embark on the difficult and treacherous journey of starting my own business. Additionally, I've worked as a barista for the last 2 or so years, and some of my friends have also gotten me into artisanal coffee shops. I love the sense of community local coffee shops have.