

Testament of Youth

The English are great at mining their past to good effect in literature and media, most evident in the myriad series made for television. Films, of course, also reflect this passion for their history, and a good recent example is “Testament of Youth” based on a celebrated WWI memoir by writer/activist Vera Brittain (Alicia Viklander).

The film, directed by James Kent, is a fine recasting of Brittain’s personal saga as a well-brought up, yet independent-minded young woman and her relationships with three young men, including her fiancé Kit (Roland Harrington) and beloved brother Edward (Taron Egerton), who all go off starry-eyed to beat the Hun in war. Desiring to be close to this male cohort, she leaves her studies at Oxford to contribute to the war effort as a nurse, a choice that eventually leads her close to the French front lines where her men are fighting. Her encounters with them and news of them form the climax of the drama, and drives Vera to become a militant pacifist.

The film is dominated by the 26-year-old Viklander, fresh from her recent, very different role as a robot in “Ex Machina.” The actress, a Swede, convinces completely as a post-Edwardian young woman determined to live a meaningful life and to support the ones she loves. Her standard look here is a concerned and earnest one, which makes her breaking out into the occasional smile that much more dazzling. This is her debut in “carrying” a film, and she does it with flair (*the film is rated “PG-13” and runs 129 min.*).