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Spirituality and Social Consciousness  
in the Art and Thought of Miller Gore Brittain, c.1930-1946

Brian Foss

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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September 1985

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## ABSTRACT

Spirituality and Social Consciousness  
in the Art and Thought of Miller Gore Brittain, c.1930-1946

Brian Foss

This thesis deals with the life, thought, and art of Miller Gore Brittain during the years c.1930-46. It examines two ideas which are frequently, but uncritically, applied to his work: spirituality and social consciousness. A careful study of Brittain's interests and activities reveals that the first of these factors played a much more substantial role in the artist's work than is usually supposed, and that it became an important contributing element to both his thought and his art at a much earlier date than is generally allowed. The second of the two factors, social consciousness, is revealed as a factor of minimal importance. Elements of Brittain's art which are often attributed to the presence in the artist of an active social conscience are more properly seen to derive largely from his spiritual convictions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Letters and miscellaneous writings by Miller Brittain are quoted or otherwise referenced with the kind permission of the artist's daughter, Ms. Jennifer Brittain.

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Appendix I. Select Chronology



## ABBREVIATIONS

AAM	Art Association of Montreal
AGO	Art Gallery of Ontario
CWM	Canadian War Museum
MMFA	Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
NBM	New Brunswick Museum
NGC	National Gallery of Canada
PAC	Public Archives of Canada
PANB	Public Archives of New Brunswick
SJRH	Saint John Regional Hospital
UNB	University of New Brunswick
VAO	Visual Arts Ontario

This thesis is dedicated to the  
memory of Charles Goldhamer  
(1903-1985)

## INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the life, thought, and art of Miller Gore Brittain from his youth to his return to his home town of Saint John, New Brunswick, after serving in World War II, but my principal concerns are not biographical in nature. Instead, I propose to examine two ideas which are frequently, but uncritically, applied to the artist's work: religion or spirituality,<sup>1</sup> and social consciousness.<sup>2</sup> A careful study of Brittain's interests and activities reveals that the first of these factors played a much more substantial role in the artist's work than is usually supposed, and that it became an important contributing element to both his thought and his art at a much earlier date than is generally allowed. The second of the two factors, social consciousness, is revealed as a factor of minimal importance, a conclusion which rejects the arguments of most other writers on Brittain. Further, elements of Brittain's art which are often attributed to the presence in the artist of an active social conscience are more properly seen to derive largely from his spiritual convictions.

This thesis is structured in such a way as to emphasize these two concepts. Chapter 1 examines Brittain's life and his art for evidence of an active interest in social conditions and social justice. Chapter 2 traces the evolution of his thought from the religious orthodoxy of his youth, through a period of interest in personal evangelism, to his probing consideration during the mid-1940's of the natures and interrelationship of good and evil, and of the transcendental importance of suffering as an integral part of the human condition. The

following three chapters apply a biographical outline to the issues raised in the first two chapters in order to identify people, situations, and issues that support the development of the hypotheses identified in those chapters. However, because the biographical chapters are used more to support a theoretical argument than to study Brittain's life in traditional chronological fashion, a detailed annotated biographical outline is provided in Appendix I.

I have opted to conclude this study in c.1946 because that year, in which Brittain was demobilized as a war artist, marks the end of his concern with objective reality. His subsequent shift into eccentric subjectivity was accompanied by new (for him) types of subject matter, new concerns about the relative importance of abstract and figurative tendencies, a new type of draughtsmanship, the use of symbolism hitherto unseen in his art, and significant changes in his personality. The first two decades of Brittain's career do prepare the viewer for the second (final) two decades, and some strands of continuity are suggested in this study. It nonetheless remains true that the two halves of his career initially appear so completely divorced from one another that c.1946 seems a justifiable date on which to end this thesis.

Since his death in 1968, Miller Brittain has been the object of a quantity of research that outstrips that conducted during his lifetime. The extraordinarily personal paintings from the 1950's and 1960's account in large part for interest taken in his work in recent years. It is to be regretted that most of the available material is of questionable value. Factual errors are repeated from publication

to publication. The few catalogues issued by Galerie Dresdner, the Toronto gallery that acts as dealer for Brittain's art, contain little textual material of interest, and much of it is inaccurate.<sup>3</sup> The much-heralded deluxe-edition Miller Brittain: In Focus by Alex Mogelon<sup>4</sup> is badly flawed by its complete absence of footnotes, its heavy reliance upon fictionalized conversations, and its several factual errors, some of which are noted in this thesis. These problems severely limit the reliability of the book as a research tool. The National Film Board of Canada's Miller Brittain<sup>5</sup> is factually reliable, but rarely speculative. Barry Lord has written, and continues to write, about Brittain, and has uncovered a number of important facts and proposed some notably original theories. His determination to squeeze the artist into a preconstructed socialist context unfortunately narrows the scope of his inquiry.<sup>6</sup>

The two best published sources of information on Brittain are Donald F.P. Andrus' 1968 exhibition catalogue Drawings and Pastels, c.1930-1967 by Miller Gore Brittain,<sup>7</sup> and J. Russell Harper's essay "The Paintings of Miller Brittain" in a 1981 catalogue, Miller Brittain - Painter.<sup>8</sup> Both, unfortunately, are very short, and repeat some factual errors from earlier sources.<sup>9</sup> but their seriousness of inquiry and the perceptiveness and originality of their insights are as valuable for Brittain scholarship as they are rare.

Regrettably, the present study cannot be considered exhaustive in its research. The artist's personal effects, including letters and artworks spanning his entire career, are being held in storage by the Canada Permanent Trust Company in Saint John. Repeated efforts to

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obtain access to the storage vaults have proved fruitless up to the time of writing.<sup>10</sup> However, almost without exception the artist's relatives and friends have been tirelessly helpful in granting interviews, writing letters, and steering the author to a number of public and private repositories of written and visual documentation. This detailed research, spread over the past four years, obviates to a very substantial degree the disappointment springing from the denial of access to Miller Brittain's estate.

## Chapter 1

## SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN BRITAIN'S THOUGHT AND ART

Throughout the entire span of time considered in this thesis, Miller Brittain drew and painted a large number of portraits of family members, friends, paid sitters, and unidentified people seen in the streets and parks of Saint John and at the air base at Brighton, Yorkshire, where he was stationed with his squadron during World War II. His much-publicized aversion to the demands of portraiture definitely postdates the War,<sup>1</sup> after which he retreated into a private world of subjective experience. His early fondness for this type of work was perhaps motivated by economic necessity: even in the midst of the Depression, people were willing to purchase their own images.<sup>2</sup> Portraits aside, the works from the 1930's and early 1940's that have become the centre of the most sustained controversy are Brittain's scenes of city dwellers.

Usually, although not exclusively, described in the literature as social realist and/or satirical views,<sup>3</sup> these drawings and paintings have not heretofore been adequately analyzed in the book, catalogues, and articles devoted to Brittain. The degree of social concern expressed in these pieces has been the subject of consideration on either side, as well as of much noncommittal waffling between these polarized viewpoints. Even Brittain's own remarks can suggest opposed meanings. For example, his seldom-quoted comment that "the dispossessed, those who had no reason for pretense, they were the only real people to me, and not those of Renoir or Monet,"<sup>4</sup> can be read as

either a pro-proletarian announcement or a simply-stated preference for life directly perceived over the artificialities of life transmuted into art. A few preliminary remarks can be made here on this question. Subsequent chapters will present arguments in connection with this preliminary statement, touching specifically on the influence of Brittain's social attitudes of his studies in New York, and the question of whether or not he espoused social reformist doctrines in his most ambitious project, his mural designs for the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital (1941-42). For the present, I will touch on the artist's family background, his choice of subject matter, the psychological conviction of his art, his formal treatment of his subjects, his relations with the wealthy, and his political beliefs.

#### Social Consciousness: Brittain's Family Background

Little in Brittain's family background and his early life seems particularly encouraging to the development of an appreciable degree of interest in social deprivation. His father, James Firth Brittain, had been born into an established United Empire Loyalist family that had emigrated to New Brunswick from Rye, New York in 1790. The ancestors of his mother, Margaret Bartlett Lord, had emigrated to the province, also from New York, shortly after the Brittains.<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, the family did not attach public importance to its own history, despite recent published assertions to the contrary.<sup>6</sup> However, in a province in which genealogical research continues to be a hobby of remarkable endurance, Loyalist descendents can be expected to be aware



of the implicit status which they enjoy.

Both Brittain's awareness of his two century-old ancestry and his disinclination to allow that ancestry to influence his activities and friendships are evident in a recollection voiced by one of his sisters: "We knew who we were, but he would never allow that to affect his social life."<sup>7</sup> In the conservative and strictly stratified world of Saint John, descendants of Loyalists, constantly reminded of their privileged place in society, were encouraged to retain certain attitudes and expectations. An unstated but understood social position gave Brittain the courage to become only the second person to list himself as a non-commercial artist in the Saint John City Directory,<sup>8</sup> and the respect to be tolerated by city residents during the 1960's despite his very eccentric and frequently objectionable behaviour. His implicit status was hardly likely to have fostered in him an inclination to launch a concerted attack on the social structure of his society. This does not, of course, preclude Brittain being aware of social problems in Saint John, a city that had suffered from an economic depression for three decades before the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. However, social awareness can be an essentially passive attitude characterized by nothing more involved than observation.

Social Consciousness: Brittain's Subject Matter

A pronounced leftist polemic associates social awareness with social conscience. Barry Lord is the most articulate and consistent

of the critics and historians adopting this stance. Relying primarily upon readings of Brittain's chosen subject matter, and to a substantially lesser degree upon iconographic analysis, and the social, temporal, and geographical contextualization of the artist,<sup>9</sup> Lord discerns a strong unifying current of populist sympathies in the artist's work during the 1930's and 1940's. Such sympathies clearly exist in Brittain's art.

People, particularly urban-dwellers from West Saint John and the downtown area of the city,<sup>10</sup> were his preferred subjects, but Lord's belief that these subjects clearly imply a social activist or even a socialist conscience stretches probability. It is true that Canadian art of the day, weighed down by the ubiquity of the Group of Seven vision, lacked a single broad-based and popularly-recognized figurative tradition, despite the presence of a respectably large number of figure painters working throughout the country. Brittain did not, as is sometimes implied, spearhead a figure painting revival,<sup>11</sup> nor did figure painting imply a socio-political consciousness on the part of the artist.<sup>12</sup>

Brittain was certainly not alone in adopting subject matter and related attitudes associated with American urban scene painting. American artists outside New York, and Canadian artists as dissimilar as Jack Humphrey and Fred Hagan, worked in styles in sympathy with these attitudes. Only a handful of Canadian artists (including Moe Reinblatt, 1917-1979; Leonard Hutchison, 1896-1980; and Frederick B. Taylor, b.1906) gave their work an intentional political orientation. For Brittain to have developed social awareness in Saint John during

the 1930's was almost inevitable, but social awareness need not necessarily culminate in social activism. The artist is remembered as a man with a highly-developed social consciousness, as are many artists who lived through the hard days of the 1930's, but without a comparable political or activist conscience.<sup>13</sup>

It is significant that Brittain's two sisters, while strongly agreeing that the artist had a deep interest in people, reject the assertion that this implied political or social dissension on his part:

I think it's just what he saw where he lived....I really don't think that he was making any sort of political or social comment because he never talked about anything like that, or rarely did....He had great compassion for people...gave everything away...but this [art as commentary] business is just ridiculous....It's just so completely opposite to what Miller's ideas were,<sup>14</sup>

Especially during the Depression, Brittain's sitters were often victims of economic forces beyond their control.<sup>15</sup> They included local newsboys eager to earn a few extra cents,<sup>16</sup> as well as men, women, and children sent to him by the Salvation Army. The down-and-out air of many of his portrait drawings of strangers is directly attributable to the physical and spiritual condition of the sitters. His primarily observational rather than polemical or judgmental approach to the life around him is outlined in his short, unpublished text, My Aims as an Artist:

...I produced my pictures of groups of people because...people interested me

most. How I felt about the people I represented. I think may easily be read and is of course an important part of the presentation... It was necessary to observe closely the character of all forms to be used. I paid a good deal of attention to the textures of surfaces, the differences of such things as hair, flesh and cloth; the behavior of clothes when covering the human figure and the effect on different fabrics when the figure was in motion. For example a heavy overcoat on a walking figure is a different story from a silk dress on a walking figure and so on. I was also endlessly intrigued by how clothes long worn became identified inescapably with the character of the person wearing them. I was more affected by the absurdity of human antics than anything else and so I was labeled a satirist when the pictures were first exhibited. Throughout this time I desired to use no other material than that which confronted me on every side. I was interested in how people looked and acted. 17

This excerpt contains the germs of a number of interesting ideas, but of particular importance is the assertion that Brittain's principal interest in his art was the accurate transcription of tangible things ("a heavy overcoat on a walking figure... a silk dress on a walking figure,") and in the capturing of "how people looked and acted." Although reference is made to the artist's interest in human behaviour, there is nothing at all to suggest a concern with attacking the larger socio-political context which conditions that behaviour. When Brittain's concern with the accurate depiction of physical reality later decreased in favour of the expression of more generalized qualities such as line, mass, and colour, these qualities were not aligned with social or political activism. 18

Brittain's attitude toward social reform is perhaps brought out most clearly in his remarks about a desperately poor young artist whose work was not understood or supported by the art patrons of Saint John:

...I have encountered recently...a young artist who existed here with his young family destitute of even the necessities of life, the victim of spiritual wickedness in high places. Those who could and should have backed him have lost their opportunity for he is established now in another place.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, the wealthy potential art patrons of Saint John were held accountable for this artist's misfortune, but it is significant that their blame lies not in being the possessors of riches denied to other members of society, but rather in their inability or refusal to respond to his art.

Social Consciousness: Psychological Conviction in Brittain's Art

Brittain's interest in accurately recording minute details of physical tangibility in drawings and paintings for which the subject matter (poverty, drunkenness, etc.) ordinarily evokes strong emotional reactions raises the question of the artist's emotional connection with his subjects. The sense of potential psychological involvement on Brittain's part in his subjects' problems is sacrificed to an empathetic but essentially non-connecting approach: almost an objectified empathy that can come perilously close to illustrational narrative. This sense of self-imposed alienation may perhaps be seen as a

forerunner of the artist's retreat into a completely private and subjective world in his works of the 1950's and 1960's. Brittain's tactics of psychological distancing have occasionally been noted by commentators on his art. For example, writing in 1969, John W. Graham stated about Little Theatre Rehearsal (1937; carbon pencil; Art Gallery of Ontario) that Brittain

literally shows all the multitude of concurrent activities relative to an amateur theatre group. Though he uses strong light and dark definition he does not achieve any real sense of urgency or excitement. The effect is rather similar to watching a soundless situation frozen in time.<sup>20</sup>

A review written nineteen years earlier expressed similar concerns:

Brittain's subject matter is treated imaginatively, but he is a realist in that he illustrates his subject matter rather than let the forms themselves suggest psychological ends. Such a literal, descriptive approach, however, demands a more powerful and capable draftsmanship than Brittain commands. Because of this serious weakness his pictures tend to be histrionic rather than moving.<sup>21</sup>

The important exceptions to this generalization about psychological reticence are Brittain's single portraits. Given the chance to know his sitters' personalities, the artist showed a remarkable ability to bring their salient characteristics to the surface. The viewer can thus achieve a stronger sense of having understood the boy who posed for Master McCullough (1930's; mixed media on masonite; private

collection, Fredericton) than is the case with the later Sidewalk Madonna (1940; mixed media on masonite; private collection). In the latter, with the child's face blotted out and the mother's reduced to shorthand notations, the viewer must fall back for his reactions on what are essentially symbolic narrative devices: the enveloping girth of the mother, the unattractive urban background, and, significantly, the title of the painting. The painting seems distressingly illustrative and the subject matter manipulated for narrative ends in comparison with the sensation of firmly grasped and intimately absorbed immediacy in Master McCullough. Molly Lamb Bobak, who insists that her own art is fiercely private in nature despite its gregarious subject matter, felt a strong empathy with Brittain in this respect:

I hate doing paintings that aren't private and I know he did, too, although he took on commissions. He even painted K.C. Irving [1965; mixed media on masonite; Beaverbrook Art Gallery], but hated doing it.<sup>22</sup>

#### Social Consciousness: Formal Qualities of Brittain's Art

The fluency of Brittain's draughtsmanship and the sureness of his compositions suffer in the works most accurately classifiable as approaching social criticism. This is most glaringly the case with his eleven cartoons for a proposed mural in the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital (see chapter four). The evident need for privacy and personal reflection described by Molly Bobak is opposed to the essentially rhetorical, didactic, and propagandistic character of true

social realism - that of Philip Evergood or William Gropper, for example - as well as to the expectation that commissioned work will convey specified attitudes. Commissioned work tended to bring out, to an unprecedented extent in his oeuvre, Brittain's latent tendency toward objectified narrative.

### Social Consciousness: Brittain's Relations With the Wealthy

Beyond his choice of subject matter, his use of psychological distancing, and variations in the fluency and quality of his technique, Brittain's classification as a social commentator can be premised on his apparently acerbic views of the wealthy. One thinks in this regard of such paintings and drawings as D'Ye Ken John Peel? (1938; carbon pencil; private collection) and Formal Party (1938; mixed media on masonite; private collection). Closer inspection, however, reveals that there is little in these works to suggest that their subjects are drawn from a class notably wealthier or more skilled in social graces than that seen in In Front of Saint John Liquor Store (1940's; mixed media on masonite; private collection), for example.

These settings, fancy dress parties and the streets of Saint John, reflect the two worlds of the young artist: his studio opposite a liquor store, or his West Saint John home near the city harbour, and the parties held by Ted Campbell and Brittain's other artist-friends. The disturbing faces in the background of Sing-Song (1938; oil (?) on masonite; Art Gallery of Ontario); for example, can be credibly seen



as cases of sympathetic exaggeration on the artist's part, especially when the viewer realizes that the people represented can all be identified by name as being Brittain's friends.

What results is neither true caricature nor satire in any derogatory sense; it is simply an amusing and friendly record of a meeting of friends.<sup>23</sup>

Brittain's relations with the monied citizens of Saint John were not tense or mistrustful, but were generally characterized by openness and warmth on both sides. For example, he visited a number of wealthy friends in New York and in the resort town of Saint Andrews, New Brunswick,<sup>24</sup> and, like other New Brunswick artists, was firmly devoted to Mrs. Alice Webster, an extremely wealthy patron of the arts.<sup>25</sup>

#### Social Consciousness: Brittain's Politics

This overview of the nature of social and political consciousness in Miller Brittain's art of the 1930's and 1940's can be concluded with a survey of his political interests and opinions during the period. Although he was in many ways "quite conservative,"<sup>26</sup> Brittain's wartime letters evoke the image of a man leaning to the left of political centre. Admittedly, the very small number of references to political events in his letters belies any particularly strong interest in this area. The surprise and dismay expressed by his relatives and friends at the idea that he may have been interested in socialist theory<sup>27</sup> further serve to downplay the importance of radical reform in his thought. When incensed by some specific issue,

Brittain was prone to express strong opinions on the foibles of officialdom, although these outbursts are recalled as being isolated reactions to occasional incidents rather than elements in a clearly-conceived political stance. In 1944, for example, he wrote about Liberal Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King:

I believe the peace is in good hands. Mackenzie King is far from colorful but walks with honour everywhere but in his own country. He was given a tremendous reception over here [London] and is not to be bulldozed by anyone.<sup>28</sup>

However, this was hardly an aberrant opinion. Though hounded by a conscription crisis, King was grudgingly admired throughout English Canada for the efficiency of his wartime administration. He was generally perceived as the only safe political choice, the alternatives being R.B. Bennett and his disastrous legacy, or W.S. Woodsworth and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. King's victory in the June 1945 election provoked a short but favourable reaction from Brittain.<sup>29</sup>

Woodsworth and the C.C.F.<sup>30</sup> are nowhere mentioned in Brittain's letters. The artist's early eagerness to enter World War II in an active duty capacity can hardly be reconciled with Woodsworth's initial opposition to Canada declaring war, or with his subsequent support based on the assumption that Canada would provide primarily economic support for the War effort. Nor do Brittain's justifications for fighting the War match the stance of the Communist Party of Canada which, after the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, supported combat

only because the conflict was no longer perceived as an imperialistic war.<sup>31</sup> Thus, despite his earlier contact with political attitudes in New York while at the Art Students League, and later with the socialist theories advocated by Norman Bethune (see chapter four), Brittain's political attitudes throughout the War matched those of most Canadian voters.

These attitudes were shaken somewhat by his disapproval of the sharp class distinctions inherent in the British social structure.<sup>32</sup> As the War progressed Brittain's chaffing against injustices springing from this hierarchical structure became more frequent, although they never came to constitute a leitmotif of frequent recurrence in his letters. After VE Day, for instance, he wrote:

Tonight I met one of the porters from the building where I work [in London], in the street near here and he took me home to have some tea. He told me of his experiences after the last war (7 years service in the army) and I do not wonder at the swing to the Left [in the 1945 British national election]. How these people existed I'll never know.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, Brittain himself clearly favoured the Labour Party in the 1945 British elections:

By the time you receive this the excitement over the British election will have died down. For my part I am pleased but very much surprised as are all the people who worked for the Socialist party. I was standing outside Central Hall, Westminster election night, where the socialists were holding a rally, and a woman gave me a ticket to go in. I had a seat in the second row and had the

great experience of seeing the great labour leaders in the flush of victory. Their speeches were uniformly good and I assure you they are a sound, intelligent and honest looking lot of men and women. Beside them their opponents seemed a bunch of twisters with Lord Beaverbrook as chief twister. Churchill was a great war leader and is still liked and respected by all...but you must understand the common man was not ungrateful to him, but simply had to face the future realistically.<sup>34</sup>

The political situations in Canada and the United Kingdom were both in line with Brittain's thinking, which was clearly undocinaire enough to support simultaneously very dissimilar parties in Canada and Great Britain. Neither a reactionary nor a radical, the artist had a humanitarian but non-activist personality that betrayed itself in his art by manifesting an unwillingness seriously to probe social problems and the need for social reform.

If Brittain's family background, his choice of subject matter, his reticent attitude in the face of that subject matter, his draughtsmanship and compositional skills, his relations with the wealthy, and his political beliefs all tend to belie the notion that his art can legitimately be seen as social realist in intention, the viewer is entitled to ask why the artist produced such a number of views of urban poverty and frustration. The answer can be successfully sought in an examination of Brittain's interest in spirituality.

## Chapter 2

## RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN BRITAIN'S THOUGHT AND ART

Britain's first pictures employing Biblical subjects date from 1941.<sup>1</sup> He continued to produce them until 1949, and on occasion thereafter. Understandably, earlier references to his views on religion are based largely or exclusively on these drawings and paintings. Such references are sometimes extended to cover the later, highly subjective works, thus equating subjectivity with religion, and both with mysticism, but never to the earlier portraits and genre scenes that dominate his work during the 1930's and the first half of the 1940's. In addition to mistakenly identifying spiritual interests only where clearly readable iconography supports it, some writers adopt the too simplistic approach of attributing the Biblical paintings and drawings primarily or exclusively to the aftermath of the artist's experiences as a bomb-aimer during World War II.<sup>2</sup> I propose to identify Britain's spiritual leanings as beginning in the early 1930's, after which time they became increasingly profound and wide-ranging as his voracious appetite for reading brought him into contact with ideas elaborated by writers as diverse as William Blake and Joyce Cary.

The term "spiritual" is used intentionally here instead of "religious." Britain spoke of his art, especially during the last two decades of his life, in terms of spiritual knowledge or awareness. For example:

Where spiritual awareness is conditioned by a combination of popular magazines and Victorian dust a work of art must

seek a home elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Even on the rare occasions when he used the word "religious," the connotations of its usage are those of generalized, a-theological spirituality. This applies, for example, to his characterization of the nature of art:

It's something you feel and it almost seems to take over. It's pushing out into the unknown....It's a religious thing. You must believe when that happens.<sup>4</sup>

The evolution of spirituality in Brittain's life and thought is marked by his interest in four clearly identifiable phenomena and/or individuals or texts: the Oxford Group, William Blake, the Book of Job, and Joyce Cary's novel The Horse's Mouth (1944). The latter three became points of interest for Brittain more or less simultaneously during the late 1930's and early 1940's, and identify the development of his thought from a more conventional religiosity to a more complicated and profound questioning of spiritual values.

#### Spirituality: The Oxford Group

Nothing in Brittain's childhood suggested the emergence of an intensely spiritual thinker. Even as a teenager he had little enduring interest in organized religion, although he was not irreligious. He attended the United Church on Sunday mornings, and Sunday school in the afternoons, but his attendance could not be considered either regular or strict.<sup>5</sup> The initial development of spirituality in Brit-

tain's thought seems to have been based on the teachings of the Oxford Group.

The Oxford Group<sup>6</sup> had been founded by Frank Buchman early in the century as a catalyst for lay rather than professional, institutional religion. It emphasized self-discipline, humility, and personal evangelism, specifically the conversion of the individual and the training of the will, and avoided adopting any clearly-defined dogma or liturgy, although the Group was much closer to Protestantism than to Roman Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> Through conversion of the individual it hoped

to create a new social order under the dictatorship of the spirit of God making for better human relationships, for unselfish co-operation, for cleaner business, for the elimination of political, industrial, and racial antagonisms.<sup>8</sup>

Group representatives had first toured Canada in 1932-33, but did not arrive in the Maritimes until 1934,<sup>9</sup> as part of their second Canadian tour. By that time the Group had gained strong support throughout the rest of Canada, and was bolstered in print by the Oxford Group supplement published by the (Montréal) Witness from 1933 to 1936.<sup>10</sup> When Group representatives swept into Saint John in 1934 they attracted 3500 people to three halls in a single evening to hear their message.<sup>11</sup> Brittain was one of the attendees.<sup>12</sup>

More so than most other areas of the country, the Maritimes in general, and Saint John in particular, had been devastated by the Depression. The eroding of the economic base and the loss of jobs in an area that already ranked below the rest of the country in productiv-

ity, income levels, and employment resulted in a near-perfect breeding ground for a religious fundamentalist movement to take root, especially one that could propose a short-cut to economic recovery.

"We believe," wrote a Group apologist, "that almost any economic system will work if the men who work it are filled with the spirit of Christ."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Buchman maintained that "when everybody cares enough, and everybody shares enough, then everybody will have enough."<sup>14</sup> The individual, not the system, was thus identified as the source of social and economic problems.

Personal evangelism rather than a harsh but realistic economic policy as a solution to the Depression was an attractive idea, particularly in those parts of Canada in which the Depression was the most severe,<sup>15</sup> and this accounts for the Group's decision to emphasize life-changing rather than world-changing during its 1934 Maritimes tour. In the wealthier cities visited earlier (Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montréal, and others), the balance between changing the world and changing one's life had not been so weighted in favour of the latter.<sup>16</sup> The effectiveness of this tactic in Saint John can be gauged by the reaction of the mayor, whose vested interest in a stronger economy, preferably achieved in a painless, morally uplifting way, made him an ardent spokesman for the Oxford Group:

If this city be led by the guidance of God, all will be right. The solution to all things rests with God, and any city that will be run by his guidance will be rich in the days to come.<sup>17</sup>

The Oxford Group promoted the idea that it was a defender of the



socially deprived, thus employing a technique well-established among evangelical groups, which usually depend for their strength on broad-based popular support. However, Buchman and his followers directed their appeals primarily toward those members of society who were, or who had pretensions to be, socially important.<sup>18</sup> It is known that the Group counted a substantial section of Saint John's "gentility" among its members, and that Brittain was friendly with some of them.<sup>19</sup> As was argued in chapter one, although he was not wealthy and was not an elitist, Brittain's consciousness of his family history contributed to the quiet sense of his social significance. It is noteworthy that, unlike himself, almost none of his artist- or writer-friends were attracted by the Oxford Group,<sup>20</sup> which clearly did not function principally as an outlet for the intelligentsia or for alienated youth.

Group meetings tended to take the form of house parties, preferably in elegant surroundings populated by ladies and gentlemen in full evening dress, and Brittain always dressed well when he attended these meetings.<sup>21</sup> They were casual social affairs that de-emphasized hymns and prayers in favour of laughter and cocktail chatter "about Christ as an everyday friend."<sup>22</sup> Brittain was a fairly typical Group member, placing strong emphasis on personal moral improvement, and becoming "almost prudish...and self-righteous,"<sup>23</sup> the latter being a trait not usually identified with altruistic social reformers. Hence, although many or most Group members, including Brittain, were sincere in their adherence to Buchman's ideas, they could hardly have ignored the almost shameless name-dropping practised by Group officials.<sup>24</sup> Nor could they long avoid acknowledging that what was ostensibly a

social action group was, in fact, more of a social tea set. As one critic wrote in 1934, at about the time the Oxford Group arrived in Saint John:

A movement which appears to revel in luxury, to live comfortably on the largesse of great wealth, and to take delight in good food, smart dress, fashionable appointments, social prestige, and the extravagances of unthinking privilege [sic] can hardly be expected to deal adequately with the clamant [sic] injustices of existing society, or to speak with sincerity and power to the dispossessed.<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, Frank Buchman himself led the Oxford Group in an intense dislike of socialism and communism.<sup>26</sup> Although he, more than most of his followers, did have a strong interest in the victims of social injustice, his interest was based on the conception of them as individuals capable of self-created salvation rather than as representatives of a specific class.<sup>27</sup> Brittain may have heard Buchman speak in Saint John,<sup>28</sup> and certainly they shared both a strong interest in personal improvement, an awareness of the intense economic and social difficulties being faced by a large segment of the population, and a reluctance to engage in direct social change. The Oxford Group thus responded directly to two pressing needs in the life of the twenty-one-year-old artist: the desire to go beyond hierarchical, bureaucratized official religion, which had never captured Brittain's imagination, in an attempt to establish a personal contact with God; and the need to reconcile his awareness of existing social conditions in Saint John with his disinclination to engage in active social criti-

cism and change. The cool, observational nature of his street scenes, so uncongenial to a social realist reading, can thus be seen to derive naturally from the teachings of the Oxford Group and from those elements in Brittain's background that made the Group attractive to him.

Like most Group members, Brittain maintained his interest for only a short period of time,<sup>29</sup> and this suggests that his interest in spirituality outweighed his interest in socializing. As the easiness of the Group's spiritual beliefs, and the insincerity of many of the other members, became clear, he, like so many other members,<sup>30</sup> lost interest. However, two aspects of the experience remained in his thought and his art from the mid-1930's onward. The first of these was the link established by the Oxford Group between personal spirituality and a fairly placid, inactive interest in humanity in its humblest manifestations. Right until the end of World War II, quotidian scenes and portraits constituted the overwhelming majority of works produced by Brittain, and almost all are characterized by a sense of non-committedness.

The second, and most important, influence of the Oxford Group on Brittain's subsequent thought and art involved the tendency of the Group to downplay hierarchized theological divisions in favour of a more generalized emphasis on unstructured, personalized religion. The encouragement offered by the Group for the artist to engage in personal evangelism with the goal of knowing himself more thoroughly had definite links with spirituality as a personal phenomenon, rather than as a prestructured relationship, complete with rules and regulations.

between denominational figures on the one hand, and mankind as a comparatively passive, homogeneous quantity on the other. Further, because Brittain would henceforth be concerned with establishing a bridge between himself and more universal powers and issues, he had little if any inclination to deal with the more mundane aspects of social reform. As he later said:

I hate Jews, I hate Catholics, I hate Protestants. I love people without their religion. The minute they start talking about religion they build a wall around themselves.<sup>31</sup>

To knock down these walls erected by the hierarchized form of religion opposed by the Oxford Group, Brittain began in the late 1930's or early 1940's to ponder universal concepts which transcended denominational divisions. Prime among them was the question of the nature of good and evil. This was a natural outgrowth of the search for self-knowledge advocated by the Oxford Group, and shows in its depth and seriousness how quickly Brittain was progressing from the questions of social organization and personal spirituality advanced by the Oxford Group to more fundamental issues of universal consequence. It was at this point that he went beyond the limited teachings of the Group and became fascinated with the related but much more profound philosophy of William Blake.

#### Spirituality: William Blake

Brittain's fondness for the poetry of Blake is well-remembered

by those who knew him during World War II.<sup>32</sup> While stationed with his Air Force squadron in England he would have had the opportunity to see the English artist's work during leaves from combat duty.<sup>33</sup> He had similar opportunities in 1945-46 when he was stationed in London as a war artist for the Canadian government.<sup>34</sup>

The philosophy of Blake included two ideas which are strongly reflected in Brittain's own thought. One of them involves Blake's two early and short treatises, which established ideas that were to inform all his later work: All Religions Are One, and There is No Natural Religion.<sup>35</sup> These tracts attack the "superstition and repressiveness of the established church and the rationalism and materialism of its critics,"<sup>36</sup> and thus characterize the non-theological and highly personal spirituality of Blake and Brittain, as well as the Oxford Group. Similarly, Brittain's extremely humanistic and secular approach to religion was reinforced by Blake's identification of the human imagination as the source of spiritual power and authority, and his argument that although the imagination feeds on sensory data, it is not limited to the world as perceived by the senses.<sup>37</sup> This latter concept, that observation of the material world is transcended by the spirituality of the observer, parallels Brittain's own shift from an initially very objective rendering of Saint John street scenes to his later transferring of the secular, sympathetic humanism of these scenes to Biblical subject matter.

However, Blake's most important impact on Brittain involved his conception of suffering as a process through which the individual becomes truly human. This idea first materialized in Brittain's cor-

response toward the end of the War and, in keeping with his previously noted psychological separation from the suffering of strangers, involved a tragedy that happened to one of his friends rather than to any of the nameless innocent who died during the War. In 1945 Janet Webster, daughter of his friends and patrons Dr. and Mrs. Webster, died in the Belsen concentration camp.<sup>38</sup> Brittain wrote to friends in Canada:

...The thought of a person like Janet Webster singing in the midst of all that horror will live with me forever. It is that sort of courage mankind must put its faith in, for there is nothing can stand against it in the long run.... For myself it has somehow personalized the whole issue and my whole line of thought for the future is profoundly sure. There is proof enough of the trouble that lies ahead.... But one must not despair. There is one fact that asserts itself. It is what much-maligned Mackenzie King said when he looked at a garment worker deformed by abuse of social laws. 'This is a human being, made in the image of God.' That must be the basis of our creed - the dignity of every human being. I believe Janet Webster was a martyr to that belief.<sup>39</sup>

Brittain's earlier letters had been peppered with references to the basic goodness of humanity. Although he clung to that belief during the liberation of the camps, the studied inhumanity found by the liberating armies must have jolted his convictions. As he wrote, in November 1944, "You wonder about the beastliness of man."<sup>40</sup> There emerges in the Janet Webster letter a split, at first subtle but gradually becoming more pronounced, between the earlier idea of the

actual goodness of all people, and the later idea of the potential goodness of all people. The first of these types of goodness is realized by only a few, who accordingly become, like Janet Webster, martyrs. Once he had introduced the ideal of martyrdom - the idea that certain people, through an extreme goodness or spirituality achieved through suffering, redeem the rest of humanity - Brittain tended to favour religious subject matter in his art. Such subject matter began to appear in quantity in 1946. He tellingly justified his use of Biblical subject matter, and especially images of Christ, the ultimate martyr, in terms reminiscent of his 1945 description of Janet Webster:

I have drawn freely from the human emotional drama of the Bible, partly because of its picturesqueness but mainly because it is played out against the conception of a suffering and triumphant God.<sup>41</sup>

It does not seem coincidental that at the very time Brittain was beginning to deal with the subject of ennobling suffering he was known to be reading Blake's Songs of Innocence. These poems were carried with him on bombing missions.<sup>42</sup> The fact that Brittain carried a copy of Songs of Innocence and not, apparently, Blake's epic poems, can be partly explained by their brevity. The hectic life at the squadron station would have encouraged the reading of works that did not require prolonged physical, as opposed to mental, attention. Brevity, however, seems not to have been the only reason for Brittain to have focussed on Songs of Innocence. A more psychologically compelling reason revolves around Blake's ideas, as expressed in the Songs of

the nature of evil and the value of suffering. As was noted above, both of these issues took on unprecedented importance for Britain toward the end of World War II.

Songs of Innocence had originally been published in 1789. Five years later Blake published a volume entitled Songs of Innocence and of Experience/Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul. The collection of poems grouped together in Songs of Experience was not published separately, and Blake clearly conceived of the two sets of Songs as a single artistic whole. It has subsequently become customary, due both to their short lengths and to Blake's preference, to publish them in single-volume format. It is thus reasonable to think that Brittain's book might have contained both sets of Songs. Even if this was not the case, his pronounced admiration for Blake's writings and his generally voracious appetite for reading strongly suggest that he would have been familiar with Songs of Experience.

Songs of Innocence deals with the world of a child's innocence, and, because of this focus, demands that the reader approach the poems with intuition rather than the rational tools of literary dissection.<sup>43</sup> However, such non-rational bliss has its price, and for all their assumption that such benevolent powers as shepherds, parents, and God will benignly protect the innocent, these poems do admit that evil exists. Completely innocent paradise therefore cannot persist indefinitely.<sup>44</sup> Evil, according to Blake, necessarily exists in all mature goodness, just as a degree of goodness must exist in all evil, and their mutual interaction is necessary if one is to avoid the sterility and shallowness of pure, untested innocence. This is a purely dialectic-



tical approach, the synthesis of which is the regeneration of mankind. One of Blake's simplest, yet most eloquent expressions of this duality occurs in "The Sick Rose" (Songs of Experience):

O Rose, thou art sick!  
 The invisible worm  
 That flies in the night,  
 In the howling storm,  
 Has found out thy bed  
 Of crimson joy:  
 And his dark secret love  
 Does thy life destroy

In other poems even love, presumably the purest of emotions, has a dark, possessive, essentially destructive side ("The Clod and the Pebble," Songs of Experience; many similar examples could be cited.<sup>45</sup>)

At first glance the parallel between Blakean thought and Britain's cogitations on suffering may appear to break down in the face of the appalling atrocity of World War II. It seems one thing to realize, as everyone must, that life is frequently unpleasant, but quite another to translate Blake's poems about roses and pebbles into the acceptance of the wholesale butchery of civilians, whether in concentration camps or in the industrial cities of the Ruhr Valley, which was heavily bombed by Britain's squadron. Yet even here Blake anticipated Britain. His poems "America, A Prophecy" and "France, A Prophecy," for example, describe the energy released in the American and French Revolutions as the force which will join innocence and experience into a higher unity.<sup>46</sup>

Blake elsewhere speculated on the concept of "Unorganiz'd Innocence," only to reject it as "an Impossibility. Innocence dwells with

Wisdom, but never with Ignorance."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Brittain wrote that he did not regret his bombs, apparently regarding World War II as a tragic interlude through which mankind must drag itself in order to create a new world.<sup>48</sup> In at least one of his letters he admitted that he hated flying bombing missions, but that it was absolutely necessary that he keep doing so until Germany surrendered.<sup>49</sup> Brittain would thus be able to justify his wartime activities to himself by couching them in terms of necessity. To have opted for simple pacifism would have been equivalent to surrendering to evil, and thus as morally cowardly as clinging desperately to false innocence. Both to Blake and to Brittain, individual initiative in times of war became a moral imperative, excusable on the grounds of the future built on that initiative.

Finally it should be remarked that this dialectical approach to innocence and experience, although it applies most clearly to Brittain's attitudes toward World War II, is also visually acute in his pre- and post-War art. This seems a valid approach to the analysis of the spirit in which both the Saint John street scenes and the later Biblical works were done, and constitutes a new, non-ideological basis on which to interpret the unmistakable nobility in such works as Sidewalk Madonna of 1940. Although it is extremely unlikely that Brittain relied upon Blake for the subject matter of his Saint John paintings and drawings, the poet's Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience do deal with poverty and its effects on people. The reader is referred, for example, to "The Chimney Sweeper" (Songs of Innocence; Songs of Experience), and to "London" and "The Human Abstract" (Songs of

Experience).<sup>50</sup>

William Blake was the pivotal point in Brittain's spiritual development. Before leaving Saint John to serve in World War II, Brittain remarked to his friends about his fondness for Robert Servant's poem "High Flight,"<sup>51</sup> which concludes with the image of a pilot flying his airplane above clouds, and reaching out to touch the face of God. That idea echoes the belief of the Oxford Group that the relationship between God and man should be personal and informal. Exposed to the horror of the War, and touched by Blake's insights into the inevitability of evil and the value of suffering, Brittain expanded the insularity of the Oxford Group's philosophy (which, despite its pretensions, dealt primarily with the individual isolated from the surrounding world) to encompass questions that inextricably link the individual to the world around him. Although Blake seems to have been the original inspiration for this idea, it was reinforced by Brittain's other favourite reading material on his bombing missions: the Book of Job.

#### Spirituality: Book of Job

Although it is agreed that Brittain knew the Bible well, those to whom he cited passages from it insist that the Bible was neither the source of his thought nor the basis of his life.<sup>52</sup> Even his references to specific verses are not seen as evidence that Brittain made the Bible a source of contemplation:

— He didn't study the Bible, although he

always carried it around with him in those days [1945-46]. He could quote from it, but only those quotations that suited his purposes.<sup>53</sup>

The Book of Job suited his purposes. His writings are mute on the attractions of that section of the Bible, just as they are silent about both the Oxford Group and William Blake, but two credible hypotheses can be proposed.

The first such hypothesis is based entirely on the fact that the Book of Job was the only book of the Bible to be illustrated by William Blake, who executed twenty-one watercolours for this purpose and duplicated them as engravings between 1823 and 1825.<sup>54</sup> Brittain's intense interest in Blake's thought and work would thus have directed him to a particularly close examination of the Book of Job.

However, Brittain would have had a philosophically more important reason for concentrating on the Book of Job. As was the case with Blake, the themes of suffering and evil play a prominent role in it. The Book of Job has been the subject of much discussion and disagreement by scholars attracted to its emotional intensity and disconcerted by its apparently ambiguous conclusion. Job, a happy and righteous man, is afflicted by Satan, with God's permission, with a series of trials to test his piety. Job's friends offer him two possible explanations for his sudden misfortune: he must, despite his protestations, have sinned and is now being punished; or God inflicts excessive suffering in order to make His children stronger, and not merely in retribution for sins committed. At the conclusion of the Book of Job, God speaks to Job, telling him that his (Job's) concen-

tration only upon his own suffering restricts his overall powers of judgment, and that human suffering is only one of many mysteries which mankind cannot understand. Job accepts God's words and so finds peace...

This summary necessarily omits or makes passing reference only to a number of points of theological importance, but the principal ones are clear. The Book of Job is concerned with the question of how one can explain human suffering, which has its origin in the will of God, when it often outweighs in its severity and randomness the sins which, supposedly, it is intended to punish. This strongly recalls William Blake's belief, expressed in Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience, that suffering is a necessary agent in the transformation of man from a state of immature, illusionistic bliss to one of true, profound humanity. Whether one deals with Job or Blake or Janet Webster or Brittain himself, the notion of fulfillment through suffering recurs as a leitmotif. This theme does much to explain Brittain's frequently self-destructive behaviour during the late 1950's, following the death of his wife, and throughout the 1960's until his own death in 1968.

God's speech to Job at first seems anticlimactic. Job has been searching for an answer to the mystery of unjust suffering, but God's answer, that mankind cannot grasp the solution it seeks, seems grossly unfair.<sup>55</sup> His advice, however, would have struck a responsive chord in a bomb-aimer grappling with the horrible unfairness of a war being waged by people like himself against civilian populations: sufferers must find the strength in themselves to transcend their con-

fusion. Only by doing so can mankind vindicate itself. What at first seems like a conclusion full of despair in its refusal to answer a disturbing question is better seen as a profoundly humanistic message of hope. Like the Oxford Group and William Blake, the Book of Job downplays rationalized, stratified formal religion in favour of a broader and more genuinely spiritual longing for understanding. Also like the Oxford Group, but on a much more profound level, the Book of Job implicitly rejects the idea of concrete reform efforts in favour of faith in extra-human fatalism and grace.

Here, then, is a dimension to Brittain's interest in people, especially the socially deprived, as subjects in his art, which had earlier been suggested by Frank Buchman. Human beings hold the key to their own fulfillment and happiness. Journalist Elissa Barnard has recently discerned something of this attitude in Brittain's Saint John and Air Force squadron scenes:

Paintings of groups of Saint John people - of a large woman in a yellow dress sitting on her front steps holding a child; of a group of longshoremen getting off work, of airmen being served by a girl who turns her face to look out of the painting - are presentations without statement. There is a sense of timeless suffering, blandly accepted as if it were the only reality.<sup>56</sup>

Brittain's figures take their places in an oeuvre more appropriately seen as humanitarian and hopeful than political and despairing in purpose and tone. For Brittain, who rejected the trappings of formal religion, his art is a secularized parallel of one of the most purely

and intensely spiritual (in the Blakean sense) books in the Bible, and a necessarily superficial (given its subject matter) expression of Job's and Blake's delving into the nature of good and evil.<sup>57</sup>

#### Spirituality: The Horse's Mouth

Brittain's abiding interest in the work of Blake and in the Book of Job may have been reinforced when, in 1944, the first edition of Joyce Cary's novel The Horse's Mouth was published in London.<sup>58</sup> That he read the novel is certain, although the date of reading is unclear. He is known to have identified with the novel's artist-hero, Gulley Jimson.<sup>59</sup>

Jimson is a mural painter. Brittain, too, was interested in murals (see chapter four), but his fondness for Jimson must be premised on a firmer foundation than a predilection for one particular medium. Jimson's preference for mural painting, although a noteworthy aspect of the novel and a support for some of its major themes, is hardly a crucial point in and of itself. Instead, I suggest that Brittain's attraction to Jimson in particular and to the novel in general is partly explicable with reference to the Blakean philosophy scattered liberally throughout the book,<sup>60</sup> most particularly dealing with the concepts of suffering (Blake, Job) and self-knowledge (Oxford Group, Blake) examined above.

The central theme of The Horse's Mouth is the relationship between the artist and his society. The theme was already well-known to Brittain, having been the most important unifying element of the

Kingston Conference, which he attended in 1941. Cary described artist and modern society as being in conflict: all elements of society, from the uninformed bourgeoisie to the museums that favour sterile academic art ("The academy [exhibition was] what you'd expect," Brittain complained in 1944<sup>61</sup>) tend to treat the contemporary artist with incomprehension. This introduces a corollary theme paralleling and supporting the main theme: the relationship between injustice and the artist's creative freedom.<sup>62</sup> The theme of injustice has clear connections with the Book of Job, and the fact that Cary did not note them does not negate the obviousness of their presence.

Cary instead posited a Blake-Spinoza conflict over the nature of evil and injustice. Spinoza recommended a passive, contemplative stance in which the human mind transcends evil by ignoring its existence. God thus becomes an icy, distant, uncaring deity who disdains even to acknowledge the existence of injustice.<sup>63</sup> This attitude was unacceptable to Job, to Blake, and to Brittain, who had enthusiastically adopted the Oxford Group's belief in the importance of establishing close, individual, personal relationships with God. Much more to Jimson's and Brittain's taste was Blake's acknowledgement of the presence of evil and his transcendence of it by the use of his freedom as a creative artist, perhaps recalling Blake's emphasis on the creative imagination in All Religions Are One and There Is No Natural Religion, to create a unity of good and evil, innocence and experience. Jimson's thought, like Brittain's was firmly anchored to a Blakean base in questions of spiritual fulfillment.

First Saint John, and later the War, made Brittain particularly



receptive to the stoic, ultimately optimistic message propounded by Job, Blake, and Cary. This attitude is summarized in an exchange between Jimson and Coker in The Horse's Mouth:

Coker: "I shouldn't mind if I'd got justice."

Jimson: "You can't get justice in this world.  
It doesn't grow in these parts."

Coker: "You're telling me."

Jimson: "It makes you laugh.... The damned  
unfairness of things." <sup>64</sup>

This viewpoint, while questioning concepts and ideals traditionally reserved to the domain of organized religion, secularizes them by making them of interest in primarily humanistic terms. Seen in this context, Brittain's Biblical subjects grew out of his long-standing obsession with humanist values dating back at least to his studies under Harry Wickey, his favourite art teacher in New York. Not an expiation of wartime guilt, they replaced his city scenes because the image of Christ, for example, evokes more and stronger reactions in the viewer. Sidewalk Madonna (1940) is thus a forerunner of Mary Magdalene (1946; pencil and wash; private collection) but lacks the latter's philosophical importance and psychological impact because the quotidian subject matter simply cannot support them.

Thus, an examination of Brittain's spiritual concerns, balanced against a consideration of his forays into social commentary and social realism, indicates that the latter, though usually emphasized at the expense of the former when dealing with the artist's pre-c.1947 art, is in fact a much more important factor. Having established this on the basis of a review of the artist's letters and of the appearance

of his drawings and paintings, as well as of recollections of his family and friends, we can now survey his biography to c.1946 for specific applications of the theories put forth in these first two chapters. Specifically, his early art training in Saint John, and especially his studies in New York, as well as his commission to paint a mural in the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital, confirm the non-confrontational character of his social themes and emphasize the humanism that came to dominate first his art and later his spirituality.

Britain's reaction to World War II, on the other hand, crystallized his emerging beliefs about evil and suffering, while his war art reveals that his ability to enter into the wartime suffering of strangers was as restricted as had been his willingness to do more than distantly observe the socially-induced suffering of the figures that populate his Saint John street scenes. The profundity of his grasp of the nature of evil and of suffering had been greatly increased, but not his will to rebel against a status quo that countenanced their existence.

## Chapter 3

## EARLY TRAINING AND ACTIVITIES: SAINT JOHN AND NEW YORK

Brittain and the Saint John Art Club

Miller Brittain showed an early facility as a draughtsman. He was enrolled for art classes in drawing and watercolour<sup>1</sup> in the autumn of 1923<sup>2</sup> at the Art School (1912-1934) administered by the Saint John Art Club. He was eleven years old at the time, and remained at the school until at least 1927, and possibly until 1930.<sup>3</sup> The school occupied the top (fourth) floor of the Market Building on Charlotte Street in central Saint John, overlooking King Square and the Old Burying Ground.<sup>4</sup> Saint John, during the 1920's, was able to offer few outlets for art training. Amateur artists had flourished throughout New Brunswick prior to the 1920's,<sup>5</sup> but activity slowed somewhat during that decade.<sup>6</sup> Alexander Watson, a talented local painter, had operated a studio school for children, but his school had died with him in 1923,<sup>7</sup> leaving only the Art School of the Saint John Art Club as an option for a young boy interested in learning to draw and paint. Art clubs in Saint Andrews and Fredericton were not formed until the 1930's and 1940's, and it was also during those later decades that the New Brunswick Museum and the Saint John Vocational School came to dominate the art scene in Saint John.<sup>8</sup>

Children's classes at the Art School were supervised by Miss Elizabeth Russell Holt,<sup>9</sup> a teacher who had a "great influence"<sup>10</sup> on Brittain through her extraordinary ability to convey her own deep love

of art. She maintained contact with Brittain for several years after he left the School, sending him a letter and a box of chocolates on at least one occasion while he was training during World War II.<sup>11</sup>

In return, he visited her from time to time after his return from the War.<sup>12</sup> Her junior classes worked in pen, pencil, charcoal, oil, pastel, and watercolour, copying the costumed figure, antique casts, and still lifes,<sup>13</sup> and depicting city views and landscapes, the latter done on sketching junkets outside the classroom.<sup>14</sup> Students also explored sculpture by carving shapes out of bars of soap. They worked independently under Miss Holt's general supervision rather than in a homogenized, conformist classroom setting. Extracurricular activities included the staging of tableaux. "It [the School] was a very social thing,"<sup>15</sup> recalls one of the junior class students.

Art styles recently developed in France and Canada (notably Impressionism and Post-Impressionism) had little impact in a province with an art tradition derived predominantly from Great Britain. Miss Holt's teaching was no exception. Despite her American training, she emphasized the established British approach to art in her classes: "good drawing, meticulous rendering of form, texture, and colour."<sup>16</sup> Her influence on Brittain should not be dismissed lightly. At an impressionable age the adolescent student found himself guided by a teacher whose "sheer persistence and talent enabled her to communicate thoroughly to her students her ideas of what art should be and something of the basic skills of drawing and colouration."<sup>17</sup> Brittain's own enduring fascination with the meticulous rendering of form is evident in his own art during the years covered by this thesis, as

well as in the work of those artists for whom he developed strong admiration.

The Saint John Art Club had amassed a collection of paintings<sup>18</sup> which it made available to students at the Art School. Although Brittain was to visit New York and Boston as a young man, his initial exposure to the art world and its traditions was probably in the form of these paintings. Most were of minimal aesthetic interest, with the exception of a few examples by Frederick Bell-Smith, William Brymner, Clarence Gagnon, John Hammond, Helen G. McNicholl, and Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Côté.<sup>19</sup> The overwhelming majority of the works were traditional turn-of-the-century landscapes. It seems unlikely that the junior classes would have been expected to copy these paintings, or even to study them in particular detail, but such expectations were common in the senior classes.<sup>20</sup>

To judge from newspaper reports and the few surviving prize lists, Brittain was considered a good but not an outstanding student, although Miss Holt long remembered the "special quality" of his art.<sup>21</sup> He is known to have won only one prize: the first-place prize for charcoal cast work in the twelve-year-old class at the June, 1926 annual student exhibition.<sup>22</sup> His work during the 1920's consisted mostly of pencil drawings of a rather mechanical nature, although they feature the continuous outline approach to drawing that was to play so prominent a part in all of his graphic work until approximately the end of World War II.<sup>23</sup>

In short, then, Brittain's art training in Saint John was a conservative one, relying heavily upon the trusted methods, materials,

and subject matter of the British art training system. There is no trace of Miss Holt attempting to imbue her students with any social theories regarding the usefulness of art in a reforming context, and the paintings to which Brittain was exposed did not include any in the tradition of the nineteenth-century French Realist artists.

Nor did the Saint John Art Club<sup>24</sup> encourage notions of art as a tool for social awareness and improvement. Brittain became a member of the Club sometime after mid-1932, and certainly no later than early 1936.<sup>25</sup> The atmosphere of the Club tended to resemble that of a pleasant but inconsequential social gathering more than anything else, and the young artist found this, as well as the unfounded pretensions of some of the members, grating.<sup>26</sup> While on the Executive Council, to which he was first elected on December 7, 1936,<sup>27</sup> he tended to restrict his activities to seconding a few motions and accepting some delegated positions, prime among which were appointments to committees charged with hanging exhibitions sponsored by the Club.<sup>28</sup>

As a member of the Art Club, Brittain had access to the lectures, exhibitions, and other social functions sponsored by that organization. The exhibitions were frequently interesting but rarely controversial. In 1937-38, for example, four exhibitions were held: the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour Annual Exhibition, Etchings of Augustus John and Gerald Brockhurst, the Fourth International Salon of Photographic Art, and Facsimiles of Old Master Drawings. During the following season five shows were mounted: the Annual Exhibition of the Maritime Artists Association, Scottish Water Colours, Children's Drawings, Reproductions of American Artists' Works, and Photographic Art.

(probably the Fifth International Salon of Photographic Art).<sup>29</sup> Brittain had served as Second Vice-President during the 1937-38 season, and as Third Vice-President during the 1938-39 year, at which time he was in his late 20's and well into his years of "social realism," but the conservatism of the exhibitions selected and hung by the Saint John Art Club show no evidence of any ambition he may have had to drag the Club into line with the social concerns of artists in New York, for example. Neither do the Minutes of Club meetings record Brittain as ever objecting to the placid course on which the Club had set itself.

Throughout the 1930's, with the exception of his brief involvement with the Oxford Group, Brittain showed no signs of the obsessive spiritual brooding of the coming decade, or of any bitterness or rebellion at the socio-economic problems of his native city. In the years covered by this thesis he emerges as a generally happy, outgoing individual,<sup>30</sup> well-liked by those who knew him. He is remembered as a kind, sensitive friend,<sup>31</sup> a good older brother,<sup>32</sup> and a popular entertainer at parties.<sup>33</sup> He vacationed at his parents' summer house at Grand Bay, travelled to Montréal,<sup>34</sup> New York, and Boston,<sup>35</sup> for example, and attended school dances,<sup>36</sup> as well as theatre and concert performances.<sup>37</sup> He was a regular member of the group of artists, writers, and musicians who congregated in the large studio owned by Ted Campbell,<sup>38</sup> and accounts of parties held there are noticeably missing recollections of political, social, or economic discussions.<sup>39</sup> Although not athletic, he swam, skied, skated, and played baseball.<sup>40</sup> "He had the most infectious laugh," recalls a close friend, "and a

great sense of the ridiculous.<sup>41</sup> To earn money he worked at a variety of odd jobs.<sup>42</sup> An avid reader, he had a particular passion for the novels of Charles Dickens,<sup>43</sup> and one should speculate on a possible connection between his own street scenes and Dickens' interest in people of all types. Aside from that possibility, though, there was little in Brittain's life during the 1930's to support the idea of the artist as a social critic, or even as a particularly astute social observer. His pictures of shoppers and derelicts gathered around a liquor store date from 1938 or later, and their sudden appearance at that date can be explained by the fact that in 1938 he left his parents' home on Winslow Street, and moved into a studio at 108 Prince William Street,<sup>44</sup> a studio which overlooked a liquor store on the opposite side of the street. The liquor store, which at first seems such a telling example of the type of subject matter a social realist artist would favour, was not sought out as a motif having desirable implications in its own right, but was rather used by Brittain because it was handy. Ease of access, not social significance, was the deciding force in the artist's selection of subject matter during the 1930's.

#### The Art Students League: Harry Wickey

In 1930, at the height of the Depression and on the basis of advice received from an unidentified director of a New York art gallery,<sup>45</sup> Brittain gathered his funds and moved to New York to study at the Art Students League. He greatly enjoyed the two years that he



lived in New York.<sup>46</sup> It has been incorrectly reported that his mother in particular was implacably opposed to her son going to "the devil's paradise" to become "another misfit living on crackers and wine."<sup>47</sup>

In reality, although both of Brittain's parents had very understandable reservations, given the economic conditions in North America, about their son becoming an artist, they were supportive of his goal. His mother, in fact, was demonstrably proud of her son's talent.<sup>48</sup>

Brittain established himself in New York, first at the YMCA ("a regular prison," he wrote)<sup>49</sup> where he stayed for several months, and later with a relative of a family friend, living in a room on 76th Street.<sup>50</sup> When Brittain arrived at the League, it already had a well-established and deserved reputation as an important centre for art training. Students followed no set curriculum. They were free to study whatever they chose, and could remain for an indefinite length of time.<sup>51</sup> Tuition ranged from \$17.00 for a two-day/week course schedule to \$30.00 for a term of full-week classes.<sup>52</sup> In the 1930-31 season Brittain registered for five courses: three "Illustration and Composition" classes (one each with George Wright: one month; Mahonri Young: three months; and William C. McNulty: three months), "Portrait Painting and Drawing" with Frank Vincent DuMond (one month), and "Etching and Composition" with Harry Wickey (four months). The following year (1931-32) he took only two courses: "Illustration and Composition" with McNulty (five months) and "Etching and Composition" with Wickey (two months).<sup>53</sup> Of his five teachers, Brittain admired Wickey (1892-1968)<sup>54</sup> for the rest of his life. "I want to give him every bit of credit I possibly can," insisted the Canadian artist many

years later. "He has been my main influence. He was a marvelous teacher, with a profound knowledge."<sup>55</sup> The two men remained in touch with each other until the death of Wickey, maintaining a strong degree of mutual esteem. In 1955, for example, Wickey wrote to Brittain expressing the hope that "things are going well for you. Your integrity deserves nothing less."<sup>56</sup>

Such a deep and enduring attachment indicates that this relationship went far beyond that of teacher and student, being premised instead on a mutual recognition and basic shared sympathies and insights. Wickey seems to have been considered an excellent teacher,<sup>57</sup> but his own art was consistently unremarkable, a variety of what was being produced by many artists active in New York during the 1920's and 1930's. Brittain could have absorbed the principles of Wickey's work in more developed form in a number of commercial and public art galleries, and this fact, combined with his clearly personal rather than professional attachment to Wickey, strongly suggests that the opinions and attitudes rather than the art produced by his teacher were of primary interest to him.

Thus, in order to delineate specific aspects of his two years in New York that had an effect on Brittain's attitudes toward social consciousness and spirituality, one should consider the opinions of Wickey and of other artists as being of prime interest, and the formal and technical qualities of their art in a secondary light. Doing so reveals that the generally noncommittal social observation of Brittain's Saint John Street scenes derives at least in part from his experiences in New York, as does his later interest in mixed media

which, as will be seen, was perceived in part as an avenue by which the artist could indicate his desire to become a more integral part of the social fabric. Specifically from Wickey, Brittain gleaned certain ideas about a humanist rather than a traditionally religious interpretation of the Bible. These ideas were later found to be congenial to the a-theological orientation of the Oxford Group. Each of these points is discussed in turn below.

Brittain's interest in street scenes was heavily indebted to the personality and teaching of Harry Wickey. The latter's autobiography, which Brittain praised in extravagant terms,<sup>58</sup> provides an altogether flattering portrait of a forthright, honest, likeable humanitarian, with an instinct to value human life for its own sake.<sup>59</sup> This attitude resulted in a consistently optimistic and enthusiastic openness to the world,<sup>60</sup> an openness that almost inevitably encouraged his "warmly social nature."<sup>61</sup> His readiness to accept - indeed, to embrace - the world on its own terms had pronounced ramifications in terms of his choice of subject matter. He favoured, almost to the exclusion of all else, quotidian genre scenes. Concerning his first months after moving to New York, Wickey wrote:

I found myself sitting in the parks, talking to down-and-outers, or listening to fellows blow off steam in saloons.... I was deeply touched by the human considerations existing among the members of the community and, although there is poverty here, the factor that I am most conscious of is the joy young and old get out of living.... The life around me is so obviously active that it comes through the walls of my workroom, keeping the creative fires burning.<sup>62</sup>

Quotidian human interest subject matter was of such great interest to Wickey that his autobiography makes far more references to it than to any other aspect of his art.<sup>63</sup> Yet, his autobiography makes only one, oblique reference to political theory,<sup>64</sup> and his fascination with the poor of New York City clearly sprang from his frequently-professed love for people rather than from any abstract political or philosophical beliefs centering on class struggle.

As was argued in chapter one, Brittain also denied sociological or political references a place in his art. Just as Wickey's love for humanity and his uncritical view of social and economic structures convinced him that "the world is fundamentally just,"<sup>65</sup> so Brittain's less embracing attitude toward the people around him led him to believe that the world is made up of beings who are fundamentally good (see chapter two).

Yet, despite these similar attitudes, Wickey and Brittain convey different degrees of involvement in their art. Brittain's Loyalist background discouraged any tendency he may have had to bridge the psychological gap between himself and the urban poor who are featured in his work. For Wickey, the farm boy from Stryker, Ohio, "whatever cultural luggage I was possessed of...had been gained by rubbing shoulders with things in the open air."<sup>66</sup> Brittain's treatment of his subjects was more observational and intellectual than his teacher's essentially instinctual view. Therefore, his basically humanitarian and hopeful intentions for his subjects, intentions inspired by the Book of Job (see chapter two), are not as immediately or grippingly evident as are the humanitarian and hopeful intentions of Wickey.

Brittain's comparatively detached view of the people around him was only reinforced in 1934, when he became involved with the Oxford Group. Still, he did try to emulate Wickey's treatment of people in his art, as is evident in My Aims as an Artist:

One experiences life and reacts to it in a variety of ways. I must try to find the right way. That is my aim in art and life and my work embodies the struggle. The beauty of the drama of inanimate nature moves me deeply, but the trials, the errors, the absurd antics and the triumphs of Everyman affect me more. In my early work [i.e., to c. 1946] I attempted to record what passed before me with truth and humour.... Here is where I quarrel with non-objective painting which seems to me to stop half-way by not joining hands with the natural world and man's experience. I believe that all thoughts and feelings are grist to the painter's mill and hate and fear as well as love have been my themes when I have felt them: 67

Harry Wickey, of course, was not the only artist in New York intensely interested in the world around him. Wickey's ebullient and hopelessly uncritical outlook made his art incapable of expressing outrage or even concern about the living conditions of the poor in New York, despite the fact that they dominate much of his work. This attitude was balanced in the 1930's by the work of a number of New York artists whose work took a more critical stance. It is in the meeting of these two outlooks - joyous acceptance of the world as it is, and anger at the unfairness of conditions in a frequently less than perfect world - that Brittain's art is best approached. While Wickey's art is incurably happy, Brittain's is ambivalent, straddling an awk-

ward line between cool social observation and unwillingness to criticize, and this sense of ambivalence seems unlikely to have derived from Wickey. Instead, it bears noteworthy similarities in attitude to the work of artists who had in the past been members of the so-called Ash Can School, to members of the Fourteenth Street School, and to the political cartoonists of the day.

#### New York: Urban Scene Painting

The Ash Can School tradition was still in evidence while Brittain was at the Art Students League, although it had been losing ground rapidly to modernism since the end of World War I.<sup>68</sup> Like the realist tradition in American literature,<sup>69</sup> the enthusiasm that had originally powered the Ash Can school during the years before World War I had lost much of its polemical force, although such artists as George Bellows, George Luks, and John Sloan continued as active realist painters into the 1930's.<sup>70</sup> Even so, Luks and Sloan, for example, were becoming increasingly intrigued with problems related more closely to aesthetics than to choice of subject matter.<sup>71</sup> Technique and technical bravado replaced social concern as the principal point of interest in the work of Bellows, Glackens, and others, while Guy Pène du Bois shifted from his earlier sympathetic view of the urban poor to a satirical scoffing at the wealthy.<sup>72</sup>

John Sloan had joined the teaching staff at the Art Students League in 1916 and became its president in 1931. Although Brittain took no classes with him, the elder artist's theories and preferences

in art mirrored and shaped the character of the League to a significant degree,<sup>73</sup> and his position as the president of that influential institution inevitably made his views well-known. Sloan was the most politically-minded of the realist artists who had dominated American art beginning in the early twentieth century, but his work has been accurately described in terms sharply reminiscent of Miller Brittain's own art:

...Even in his sympathy [for the people who populate his canvases] he remained always the spectator, standing slightly apart. His art...lacked militancy: the most one finds is a jibing satire of pretension and snobbery....The measure of his greatness is in the warmth of his reporting.<sup>74</sup>

A similarly ambivalent line between social reportage and criticism was drawn by such comparatively independent artists as Edward Hopper, one of Brittain's favourite painters.<sup>75</sup> Hopper's oblique criticism of the loneliness of American urban life cannot be construed as social protest per se, but it does identify a significant source of malaise in the American city, conveyed by means of an ascetic elimination of detail in his objective paintings.

Like Hopper, Sloan, et al., Kenneth Hayes Miller (1876-1952)<sup>76</sup> reflected a sense of ambivalence between social observation and social criticism in his paintings. Twice in his autobiography Wickey mentioned Miller,<sup>77</sup> who was teaching a mural painting course at the League throughout Brittain's period of study in New York.<sup>78</sup> The New Brunswick artist did not enroll in Miller's classes, although this does not rule out the possibility that he may have visited them on occasion,

possibly at the suggestion of Wickey, who held Miller in high esteem. The Art Students League permitted its students to visit classes in which they were not enrolled, and Hayes Miller's excellent reputation as a teacher may have excited Brittain's curiosity.<sup>79</sup>

In terms of subject matter, Hayes Miller acted as the nucleus of a group of artists<sup>80</sup> who, in the late 1920's, developed one urban counterpart to the regionalist painting of Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, et al. This group, the Fourteenth Street School, was similar in many respects to the Ash Can School, and took its name from the street that became the centre of its members' interest:

Commercially it [Fourteenth Street] was the poor man's Fifth Avenue. But in addition to that, it was also the traditional centre of radicalism, symbolic of free speech and free assembly. Here open-air meetings and demonstrations were held. It was a place rich in memories of social struggle. However, it was not only a focal point for radical groups... The women bargain-hunters, the sidewalk pitchmen, the soapbox orators, the political rallies, the park-bench philosophers, the Bowery bums, all became part of a new American folklore...<sup>81</sup>

The people who filled the stores and theatres of Fourteenth Street were similar in social standing and pastimes to the figures chosen by Wickey and Brittain. Further, the fading sense of social struggle associated with an area which, to judge from the matrons who populate Hayes Miller's paintings, was attempting to generate a semblance of social respectability, recalls the ambivalent line tentatively drawn between social awareness and social commentary by Miller Brittain.<sup>82</sup>



The same reticence appears in the work of Hayes Miller's students, all of whom were Brittain's contemporaries.<sup>83</sup> Reginald Marsh, Raphael and Moses Soyer, Morris Kantor, Isobel Bishop, and Edward Laning.

Marsh, for example

of all the second-generation realists... was the most completely and consciously a reporter, drawing voraciously all that came within his vision.... Swallowing life as he did with a kind of uncritical relish, he was no profound commentator.<sup>84</sup>

This trait was often an intentional one, especially for Hayes Miller, who maintained that "emotion in art is suspect because it tends to displace some of the form."<sup>85</sup> For Miller, swelling form, not emotional conviction, was the conveyor of life in art: "Art that concerns itself with objects, with actualities of forms, is concerned with life."<sup>86</sup>

Finally, the political cartoonists of the 1930's join Wickey, the remnants of the Ash Can School, and the members of the Fourteenth Street School as an influence on Brittain's choice of subject matter and his attitude toward it. Several of these cartoonists, all involved in producing work that was exclusively or primarily concerned with social and/or political protest, had been active in New York since World War I. The New Masses magazine (inaugurated in 1926) and Liberator (begun in 1918) served as outlets for dissent, and artists such as William Gropper and John Sloan tied their social protest drawings to political rebellion by printing their cartoons in these publications. Many of these artists had achieved degrees of public recog-

nition by the late 1920's, and Brittain, as a young art student, can reasonably be expected to have been at least passingly familiar with their work.

The harsh, pointedly militant cartoons of Gropper, Adolf Dehn, Peggy Bacon, and others struck no responsive chord in Brittain.<sup>87</sup> To judge from his art, he was sympathetic to the work of artists who worked in a more traditional cartooning mode, relying upon symbolically representational images. These images, produced by Boardman Robinson, Robert Minor, Maurice Becker, and others,<sup>88</sup> contrasted, in their benign humour and their sympathy with the human situation in general, with the very specific social problems and outrages tackled by Gropper, for example. It is probably to Robinson and his associates that Brittain owed much of the blunted criticism evident in such essentially sympathetic, good-natured drawings as Rummage Sale I (1939; carbon pencil; private collection, Toronto), Sing-Song, and Formal Party.

The sharply angular lines of Sing-Song and Formal Party are reminiscent of the jagged outlines and details of such cartoonists as Peggy Bacon. Thus, although the humour of these works has little to do with Bacon's acidity, their technique has close ties to her own. The adoption of the technique of using angular lines often seems strained and unconvincing in Brittain's hands, whereas the same lines used by Bacon provide a visual counterpart to her acerbic, thrusting wit. They act as a formal device that has immediate psychological overtones for the mood and intention of Bacon's cartoons, in which intention and means are one. However, they jar when forced into the service of Brittain's humanitarian and apolitical cartoons, which thus

have a tendency to emerge as pastiches of observed mannerisms. Boardman Robinson's and Maurice Becker's cartoons are close to Brittain's own in technique as well as attitude, with their Daumier-esque (especially for Robinson) lines and their sense of underlying form.<sup>89</sup> Brittain's reliance upon swelling form to create contour was more in harmony with his benign vision of humanity.

Robinson's and Becker's work, although more like Brittain's in style and outlook than Bacon's, is still remote from the art produced by the Canadian. Much closer are the drawings of Eugene Higgins, whose concern, like Brittain's, was with the urban poor rather than with political and economic activism. Intriguingly, Brittain's ambivalent sense of reticence toward his subjects resembles that of Higgins more than any other artist,<sup>90</sup> and Higgins' tendency to generalize rather than deal in closely apprehended specifics when faced with social problems also became characteristic of Brittain's work. As has been very justly observed of Higgins:

He is not strictly speaking a realist, for the specific manifestations of injustice and oppression are less important to him than the universality of the idea. His people have become symbols rather than human beings and his paintings have all the remoteness of biblical quotations.<sup>91</sup>

Brittain's establishment of a psychological barrier between himself and his subjects is disguised, as is Higgins', in the elegance of his draughtsmanship, this very elegance itself tending to make Brittain's work more immediately identifiable as fine art than as message art.

Thus, Brittain's interest throughout the 1930's and the first half of the 1940's in urban subject matter seen with a non-committal detachment can be seen to have been inspired in part by many artists active in New York in the early 1930's. Beyond this ambivalent treatment of urban-dwellers as subject matter, Brittain also absorbed ideas about mixed media during his 1930-32 studies. These ideas were to have implications on his concept of painting as a socially responsible medium of expression.

### Mixed Media Painting

The precise materials and techniques employed by Brittain in the production of his paintings are often obscure, and art galleries and museums lack the time, manpower, and funds to engage in chemical analyses of his works to determine their physical make-up.<sup>92</sup> Brittain's experimentation with assorted media situate him squarely within the context of North American painting during the 1930's and 1940's. An interest in mixed media painting had surfaced in the United States during the 1920's. New York played a leading role in media experimentation, and the Art Students League acted as one early focal point for interest in the activity.<sup>93</sup> Among the artists engaged in serious work with mixed media during the late 1920's was Kenneth Hayes Miller.

The study of media and techniques was rooted in the desire on the part of many artists to reintegrate themselves into society, a desire that crystallized in such phenomena as the publication in 1937 of Art and Society by Herbert Read.<sup>94</sup> The concern with traditional media and

craftsmanship would, the artists hoped, return artists to the streets, and can thus be seen as a phenomenon paralleling in intention the work of the vanguard social realists, as well as the populist, humanist philosophy of Harry Wickey. Five reasons for the serious study of media and techniques were accordingly identified:

1. A desire on the part of the artist to become again a responsible workman and to be accepted as such by society.
2. The realization that by means of our accustomed technique of direct oil painting we simply cannot begin to duplicate many of the qualities achieved by the old masters.
3. The rapidly growing realization that these qualities were not attained by means of "secret" mediums but through a logical and intelligent use of the materials at their command.
4. The desire of every artist that his work shall endure.
5. The consciousness that the arts of architecture, sculpture and painting are, for the most part, indivisible and that when the time for a real reintegration comes we, as painters, must be prepared to build as soundly and as expertly and as responsibly as we would expect an engineer or an architect to do.<sup>95</sup>

The experiments of Hayes Miller and others became objects of more widespread investigation during the 1930's.<sup>96</sup> Miller's own interests were concentrated on the Italian Renaissance, and his concern for the roundly modeled style and carefully organized compositions of that period, as well as the tonal richness and the subtlety of painting which characterized it, led him to consider the brightness, clarity, and chemical stability of egg tempera covered with glaze. By alternat-

ing oil glazes with layers of opaque tempera, he could paint the glazes into the water-soluble tempera, and the two media would then dry together. The result was an ability on the part of the artist to refine the modeling in a cumulative process, each successive layer of glaze deepening the tonal richness and subtlety of the painting.<sup>97</sup>

Brittain's earliest mixed media paintings postdate his studies at the Art Students League, but predate the 1941 Kingston Conference, at which the techniques of mixed media painting were discussed.<sup>98</sup> He began experimenting in 1938<sup>99</sup> with what he referred to as the "Van Eyck technique,"<sup>100</sup> a phrase apparently borrowed from Max Doerner's book The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting (1921; English translation, 1934).<sup>101</sup> This book, the same one used by Hayes Miller,<sup>102</sup> was described by Brittain as "an important part of my equipment."<sup>103</sup> The 1934 version of the book is flawed in comparison with the German original, lacking some of its clarity and directness, but the contents do not collapse under close scrutiny. Doerner analyzed the techniques of the European masters with remarkable authority and insight, arguing that "craftsmanship must again be made the solid foundation of art."<sup>104</sup>

However, unlike many American and Canadian artists during the 1930's and 1940's, Brittain seems not to have been interested in the revival of mixed media and fine craftsmanship in art for reasons of social reintegration for the artist. Just as his non-evaluative attitude in the face of his scenes of urban social problems, as well as the other factors discussed in chapter one, make it risky to label him as a socially committed figure, so too does he seem to have made ex-

tensive use of mixed media for reasons other than those explained at the Kingston Conference,<sup>105</sup> for example. Harry Wickey, although not a painter, argued strongly in favour of artists putting emphasis on fully rounded, convincingly three-dimensional form.<sup>106</sup> Brittain followed this advice in his drawings throughout the 1930's and the first half of the 1940's.<sup>107</sup> Regarding his painting, he maintained that an oil-tempera combination served to "give full expression to plastic surfaces."<sup>108</sup> André Biéler, a fervent propagandist for mixed media, recommended it for similar reasons.<sup>109</sup> Brittain must also have appreciated the fact that the use of egg tempera in combination with oil glazes facilitated the linear emphasis<sup>110</sup> that he had developed to a pitch of elegant grace through his years of draughtsmanship. Oil alone is not suitable for the creation of comparable effects.<sup>111</sup>

In conclusion, then, concerning Brittain's exposure to social reformist concerns in art while he was studying in New York, the effects on him seem to have been minimal. In terms of subject matter, he absorbed a sense of the dispassionate observation of his subjects, rather than a sense of active social conscience. This coolness fitted well with his own family background, and was to be reinforced by the influence of the Oxford Group in 1934. In terms of media and techniques, Brittain adopted the use of mixed media, but without accepting the social implications that this type of usage was intended by many of its supporters to convey.

New York: Brittain's Spiritual Development

Brittain's spiritual development in New York was similarly slight. The only known influence in this regard was Harry Wickey. The latter was strongly interested in the Bible, describing it as a book that had occupied him greatly for a period of three years.<sup>112</sup> He was, moreover, very clear about exactly why the Bible touched him deeply:

The more I read the more thoroughly I felt that this Book had been written by men like myself... The prophets were humans like myself, full of anger at certain things and an unlimited love for others. This was a nature book purely and simply and had nothing to do with all the credistic paraphernalia that was hiding its meaning from the most of mankind... And it is my opinion that if the reading of books like the Bible lead the thoughts toward heaven rather than earth, it is entirely due to an erroneous conception of the true meaning contained in them.<sup>113</sup>

For an artist as fascinated with the basic goodness of humanity as Brittain later proved to be, Wickey's ideas were significant. Both Brittain and Wickey appreciated the Bible in an essentially humanistic, secular spirit. Brittain, in fact, was to pursue this conception of religion as an unstructured, personal experience through the increasingly complex ideas of the Oxford Group and William Blake. His depictions of Biblical figures underlines this essentially secular humanist interpretation: the figures are caught up in pressingly important conflicts, all of which revolve around the problem, so dear to Brittain, of good, evil, and suffering. They are thus seen struggling with those concepts



with which Brittain himself struggled during World War II - questions that must concern anyone involved with humanist thought. "I have drawn freely from the human emotional drama of the Bible," Brittain wrote, "...mainly because it is played out against the conception of a suffering and triumphant God."<sup>14</sup> Wickey's statement that the Bible should lead the reader's thoughts toward earth rather than toward heaven is a similar view of the personal, secular nature of religion. Brittain's path to spiritual maturity may thus have begun in New York.

## Chapter 4

## THE SAINT JOHN TUBERCULOSIS HOSPITAL MURAL CARTOONS

In 1941-42 Brittain began work on his first two mural commissions.<sup>1</sup> The first of the pair, executed in 1941 at the Lady Beaverbrook Gymnasium at the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton) was completed quickly and occasioned no controversy.<sup>2</sup> The second commission, at the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital, was never completed, is poorly documented, and has since become a subject of controversy. It warrants a lengthy discussion for the light it sheds on Brittain's lack of interest in the use of art for social or political reform.

Early in 1939 Brittain was approached by his friend Dr. R.J. Collins,<sup>3</sup> Medical Director of the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital, with the proposal that he design and paint a large-scale mural at the Hospital. The artist was enthusiastic about the project, writing to a friend:

Dr. Collins has asked me to give him an estimate of the cost of a mural to cover two whole corridors of the new wing! It wouldn't be possible to do that. It seems to me that an arrangement should be made whereby they give me a certain section as a sample [,] agree to pay for materials and so much per week, then estimate the total cost from that. I intend to see Dr. Collins again in a few days. It looks like a wonderful opportunity - much more than I had anticipated.<sup>4</sup>

Brittain did not begin work on the project until 1941.<sup>5</sup> The lapse of more than two full years between the original proposal and the beginning of work cannot be explained based on available documentation.

In any case, not until September 1941 did Dr. Collins announce at a Hospital Board meeting that Brittain had offered to execute the murals for an extremely low fee.<sup>6</sup> The artist spent the winter of 1941-42 designing and enlarging the eleven cartoons, each some 110" x 100", which were to make up the mural. He demonstrated to the public the techniques used for enlarging at the "Artists in Action" seminar/conference held at the Maritime Art Association convention in Fredericton in 1942.<sup>7</sup> He had completed enlarging all but one of the cartoons when, in 1942, Dr. Collins was informed by the Hospital administrator that funds were not available to complete the project.<sup>8</sup> An embittered Brittain<sup>9</sup> abandoned the project on these grounds. In his 1946 "Who's Who in American Art" biographical questionnaire, the artist noted that the mural was "interrupted by service during the war,"<sup>10</sup> but this is elsewhere corroborated only in a small number of reports,<sup>11</sup> and has not been advanced by any of those interviewed for this thesis as a possible reason for the cancellation of the project.<sup>12</sup> The cartoons, forgotten for several years afterwards, were found rolled up in the storage cabinets of the New Brunswick Museum Art Department in 1965.<sup>13</sup> They are all now in the permanent collection of the Museum.

The abrupt and unexplained cancellation of the project has been a topic of speculation.<sup>14</sup> The artist's available letters shed no light on the mystery, nor do the Minutes of the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital Board meetings, which are silent on the entire commission.<sup>15</sup> Any speculation about the cancellation must be grounded in both a study of the subject matter, composition, and draughtsmanship of the

cartoons, and a survey of probable sources of influences for them. Such a study suggests that although the apparent official reason for ending the commission was a lack of money, the lack of money may conceivably have been an excuse to hide more disturbing reasons.

### Appearance of the Cartoons

The eleven cartoons are in charcoal, crayon, and chalk on brown paper. They were originally intended to cover the walls of the corridors that led to the operating room, as well as those of a large working area.<sup>16</sup> The Minutes of a Hospital Board meeting specify that the murals were intended for the Surgical Wing,<sup>17</sup> and a contemporary newspaper account confirms and elaborates on this by saying that the walls in question were the plaster walls of the corridors of the new surgical wing. In keeping with accepted mural painting techniques, the work was to be done in egg tempera.<sup>18</sup>

The cartoons are based on the general theme of the causes and cure of tuberculosis, although Brittain may have interpreted this theme somewhat more narrowly than the Hospital officials had hoped.<sup>19</sup> The dirty and poor parts of cities were prime breeding grounds, although by no means the only ones, of the disease, and five of the eleven cartoons deal entirely or partly with this topic. In the first of them, two figures (the man leaning on the blank shape planned to contain a real door, and the figure behind him), are ill. A second scene is set inside a dilapidated house or apartment, where a young woman in bedraggled clothing is supported by a man, presumably her husband, and

makes a vague effort to comfort a boy, probably her son. A young man, ostensibly trying to read, gazes into space. His body is crammed into a tiny space between a wall on his right, a wall immediately behind him, and the blank diagonal space in the cartoon where a real stairway was to cover part of the wall. A third cartoon shows the entry into a billiard parlour. Five children run or walk near the entrance. Yet a fourth and part of a fifth cartoon contrast drunken or melancholy partygoers against poverty-stricken figures in the background. Finally, the right-hand third of the last completed cartoon shows an undifferentiated scene of urban crowding and squalor. The point is emphasized by a hand printed sign reading "SLUM LUNCH."

The cartoons devoted to the cure of tuberculosis show, respectively, the lobby of a hospital (presumably the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital),<sup>20</sup> a chest x-ray being taken, an operation, and the cured patients walking in a group toward the viewer.<sup>21</sup>

Brittain's work had never before included such crowded scenes. The artist's concern with individual figures, combined with the small scale of his earlier work, had led him to restrict the number of people shown. The Hospital cartoons thus represent a sharp departure from his other art. The result, while often admirable and inventive, is subject to several compositional failings. Structural arrangements to allow for the naturalistic disposition of real doors and stairways, for example, tend to be awkward and jarring. The Bacchus or Silenus figure in the party cartoon sits convincingly on top of a real door, but such a happy solution is rarely evident elsewhere. In the operating room scene a doorway obliterates much of the body of the nurse on

the left without bearing any perceptible thematic or formal relationship to her. Similarly, a real door occupies much of the lower left section of a drawn door in the billiard hall cartoon, cutting without apology or explanation into the body of a large male figure and completely concealing all but the forearm and hand of another figure.

The draughtsmanship in these cartoons is also somewhat awkward.<sup>22</sup> Brittain had long been subject to moments of anatomical inexactitude in his art, but rarely does it appear so jarringly as in the attempt to suggest a joining between the neck and the left shoulder of the background man in the construction workers cartoon. Other instances of this problem exist in the other cartoons, and although they do not seriously flaw the work they are both frequent and obvious enough that they distract from the overall unity and flow of the draughtsmanship.

Also in evidence in the cartoons is a willingness to plunder the history of art in search of poses and compositional ideas. Such an approach was not unique to Brittain, of course, and in his own art it is not unique to these cartoons.<sup>23</sup> However, in other works the unobtrusiveness of Brittain's art historical borrowings can be accounted for by the fact that the compositional devices have been both borrowed and assimilated in dialectical fashion to produce a convincing variant. In the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons the borrowing is not consistently digested and rethought, resulting in sections in which the viewer is immediately aware that he is looking at a well-established formal device, even if the source of the device cannot always be immediately identified. Perhaps the most obvious example of

this is found in the cartoon showing a healthy family group on the left, a crowded slum scene on the right, and four walking men used as dividers. One of these men gestures at the healthy family with his right hand, and that gesture functions as an unmistakable visual recollection of dozens of similar gestures in a wide variety of illustrative and/or didactic artworks, including depictions of Christ in Judgment.<sup>24</sup>

It has been proposed that the mural project, being a commission, probably limited Brittain's freedom of expression, by forcing him to conform to a thematic programme.<sup>25</sup> That he was expected to do so to some extent is evident in the fact that Dr. Collins at one point halted Brittain's work in order to discuss the "historical background" of the subject matter with him.<sup>26</sup> Combined with the unaccustomed (for Brittain) large size of these drawings, the requirement that he force the mural designs into an independently existing plan may well account for the unusually stilted draughtsmanship and the pronounced didactic character of the cartoons.

#### Origins of the Cartoons: The American Mural Renaissance

Regarding the origins of Brittain's cartoon designs, one can tentatively identify three principal sources of inspiration: the American mural renaissance of the 1930's and 1940's, the interest among several American and Canadian artists in Mexican mural paintings during that same period, and the ideas and ideals of Dr. Norman Bethune. These disparate sources seem to have provided the artist with specific philo-

sophical bases, all of them touching on aspects of the potential social activism of art, upon which the Saint John cartoons were partly built. These bases include most particularly the potential of murals to foster social change, their role as bridges between the traditional elitism of the fine arts and the public in general, and even the social, economic, and political causes of disease.

Brittain had studied at the Art Students League during the early years of the mural revival in the United States, a revival that took place in New York and other centres, although only one of his teachers at the League, Frank Vincent DuMond, was a muralist.<sup>27</sup> However, Kenneth Hayes Miller had inaugurated a highly popular course in mural painting at the League in 1926.<sup>28</sup> The fact that Miller did not execute any murals of his own<sup>29</sup> certainly did not affect the affection and esteem in which he was held by his students,<sup>30</sup> and he may thus have acted as one introduction to the idea of mural painting for Brittain. A photograph exists (private collection, Saint John) showing Brittain and a few others working on a charcoal on brown paper mural cartoon at the Art Students League. Jim Stackhouse, one of Brittain's former students, cautions that this evidence does not necessarily imply that the group of students (for such they are assumed to be) was working on an actual mural. The cartoon may have been an exercise designed to give students experience in the technique of pouncing.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the point of the exercise, the photograph remains as circumstantial evidence that Brittain had a connection of some sort with Hayes Miller's mural painting class at the Art Students League.

In any case, the young Canadian would hardly have required a



mediating figure to introduce him to the interest in mural painting that began to sweep the American art world in the early 1930's under Roosevelt's New Deal. Among other factors, the economic boom of the 1920's had served as the catalyst for the widespread appropriation of non-elitist, social art from the mass media and its transposition to public walls. While Brittain was a student in New York, Thomas Hart Benton painted what were perhaps the most ambitious and best-known examples of the early mural revival: America Today (1930-31), a set of nine paintings at the New School of Social Research.

In June 1941, nine years after his return from New York, and the same year he began the cartoons, Brittain and 148 other professional artists, art critics, and art educators attended the Conference of Canadian Artists (the Kingston Conference).<sup>32</sup> The mammoth four-day event was held at Queen's University from June 26 to 28, and at the National Gallery of Canada on June 29. The Conference had been planned as a forum for the study and discussion of two principal themes, the first of which was the position of the artist in society.<sup>33</sup> The invited speakers included Thomas Hart Benton and Edward Rowan, both Americans, because "the Americans in the last fifteen years have made great advance [sic] in the happy relation of the artists to their society."<sup>34</sup> As Walter Abell wrote in an editorial in the recently-founded Maritime Art magazine, the Conference had been pervaded by a consciousness of the "relation of the arts to the whole of Canadian society."<sup>35</sup>

Brittain's only located reference to the Conference is a fascinating one:

One of the outstanding personalities at the conference was Edward Rowan who is second in command of the section of fine arts in the U.S. - government murals, etc. I travelled with him to Montreal. He is really a very sensitive and brilliant man and his lecture on his activities in connection with the Fine Arts Project was the highlight of the Conference, in my opinion.<sup>36</sup>

The lecture referred to in this excerpt was "The American Renaissance," delivered on the evening of Saturday, June 28. It was at approximately that date that Brittain developed, or at least first expressed, the opinion that governments should sponsor murals in public buildings.<sup>37</sup> His admiration for Rowan, a representative of just such a government programme, must be taken into account in any analysis of the Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons.

The address was a general overview of the activities of the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture, established in 1934.<sup>38</sup> Rowan, attached as he was to the murals department of the Section, restricted his remarks to that medium. He outlined the reasons for the establishment of the Treasury Section, its fee structure, the competition system used to select artists and designs, favoured subject matter and styles, and local reactions to the commissioned murals. In conjunction with these remarks he showed a number of lantern slides of proposed designs and of completed murals. At the beginning of his lecture he suggested that its title could have been "You Can Do It Here" rather than "The American Renaissance."<sup>39</sup> and he urged the creation in Canada of a public mural renaissance in his remarks on the value of murals:

... Things are happening when the general public, uninformed on art; the people who have not had the opportunities that you and I have had, take... interest in works of art, whether they agree or disagree with those works.<sup>40</sup>

The murals commissioned by the Treasury Section are strikingly similar to Brittain's paintings in their sense of reticence in the use of local interest scenes. In the case of the murals, the reticence is explicable partly by reference to the primacy of design rather than expression as the overriding element in good mural conception, and partly by the fact that the commissioned artists were almost never natives or residents of the communities for which the murals were designed. This parallel sense of reticence strengthens any case being made for Brittain's receptivity to contemporary American murals.

Rowan's emphasis on the importance of the artist living actively in his society, and in making his art above all else a passionate and compassionate reflection of that society was given fuller expression in his address:

I think our greatest importance has been in the fact that we have taken the artists out of their ivory towers; we have encouraged them to cut their hair, to put both feet on the ground and to meet the public. In other words we have once more introduced the studio hermit to the public, to the people who are marrying, who are having children, who are putting in plumbing installations, who are putting up houses, and so on. The artist has been brought to them; they have been brought to the artist. You cannot have a two-sided affair without having both sides affected in some way.<sup>41</sup>

This is remarkably close in tone to Harry Wickey's visual and verbal celebrations of humanity, and to Brittain's own testimony about his art:

...I produced my pictures of groups of people because...people interested me most. How I felt about the people I represented I think may easily be read and is of course an important part of the presentation.<sup>42</sup>

Rowan's stance, read in a populist vein rather than one of social conscience, is thus remarkably close to Brittain's ideas.

A final point of interest for Brittain in Rowan's lecture would have been the examples he illustrated and discussed. Although only a few artists were specifically mentioned, it is surely significant that two of them were Ben Shahn<sup>43</sup> and William Gropper.<sup>44</sup> Brittain would have been aware of the protest-oriented work of both of these men from his days at the Art Students League. The sharpness of social protest evident in the 1941-42 Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons is discussed below in connection with the influence of the thought of Norman Bethune. Rowan's reminders in the summer of 1941 about social protest murals may have been a contributing factor to the attitudes apparent in Brittain's own work at the Hospital.<sup>45</sup>

#### Origins of the Cartoons: The Mexican Mural Movement

The influence of the Mexican muralists' work on the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons is somewhat more problematic. A direct influence, if one existed, would have been based on the idea of the

revolutionary potential inherent in art, and especially in large-scale public art. Any such discussion, however, must be counterbalanced by consideration of Britain's own attitudes toward politics and revolutionary change. Thus, although the Tuberculosis Hospital mural cartoons are fairly harsh in their condemnation of urban poverty, they do not seem to advocate political radicalism as a solution. They instead encourage, in calm, reasoned accents, the elimination of poverty and filth. The final complete cartoon, showing four men taking almost passive note of the difference between the slum on their left and the healthy, uncrowded, comparatively prosperous family on their right, has little in common with the will to violent political or social upheaval propounded in the art of Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco. In the Mexicans' art, violence and radical change are urged not only in the use of clearly depicted acts of revolution and in the representation of specific Marxist figures, but also in the convulsive swirls that often form the basis of the composition of these works. By contrast, the Britain cartoon under discussion is divided with vertical geometricality to emphasize stability and reasoned progress.

Nonetheless, Britain could hardly have avoided being aware of the work of the Mexican muralists during his student years in New York or during his subsequent visits to that city. He admitted in an interview recorded in the early 1960's that he had great affection for the art of Rivera,<sup>46</sup> and spoke favourably about the latter's work to his friends in New Brunswick, at least during the late 1930's and early 1940's.<sup>47</sup> By his own account he had not, at the time of working on

the Hospital cartoons, seen any original works by the Mexican artists,<sup>48</sup> but this must be balanced against the fact that Rivera was given a large exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art from December 23, 1931 to January 27, 1932.<sup>49</sup> In addition, Portrait of America, a book written by Rivera about his public art in the United States and its revolutionary intentions, features reproductions of a number of complete photographs and details of that artist's murals in the United States.<sup>50</sup> The book was published in 1934, two years after Brittain ended his studies at the Art Students League, but it was then, and continues to be, readily accessible.

Formally, Rivera's art has little in common with Brittain's. Although the two artists did share an interest in a Brueghelesque round fullness of form, the monumentality of Rivera's figures and his evocation of power and the inevitability of change, through his subordination of individual forms to an overpowering sense of pattern, are not echoed in Brittain's fussier, less symbolic cartoons. Entirely aside from such formal concerns, Rivera's idea of art as a proponent of social change, and perhaps also as an agent in effecting that change, have clear implications for the didactic Hospital cartoons. Nevertheless, it remains significant that Brittain seems to have had a particular interest only in one of the Mexican muralists: the one whose painted forms are conceived alike in terms of three-dimensionality to those of Brittain, Harry Wickey, and Hayes Miller. This fact suggests that Brittain's special interest in Rivera was based in part on formal, stylistic considerations. Had it been based on an ideal of socio-political radicalism, his lack of recorded interest in

Siqueiros and Orozco would be a mystery.

The socio-political messages of the Mexican artists were not lost on American artists of the 1930's, however. Many, in the crushing conditions of the Depression, adopted the angry stance of the Mexicans, and their work had a large audience of artists during Britain's years of study in New York. In 1932, the Canadian artist's final year at the Art Students League, the Museum of Modern Art opened its new 53rd Street building with the Murals by American Painters and Photographers exhibition. The show was a vindication not only of the strong interest in murals in general amongst many of the progressive artists in the city, but of interest in revolutionary art in particular. The exhibition had been "stimulated in part by the Mexican achievement,"<sup>51</sup> according to the accompanying catalogue, but this mild statement belittles the furor occasioned by the inclusion of Hugo Gellert's Class Struggle in America Since the War, William Gropper's The Last Defenses of Capitalism, and Ben Shahn's The Triumph of Lenin.

By the early 1940's the power of the Mexican artists' murals was making a definite impact in Canada. The determination of these painters to use art as a social instrument for the reintegration of the artist into society in an active, viable manner meshed perfectly with the Canadian national desire for this reintegration, as expressed at the Kingston Conference. The impact was particularly strong among Toronto artists, for example. The Art Gallery of Toronto hosted two extremely influential exhibitions of Mexican art in 1943 and 1946.<sup>52</sup> New Brunswick art circles were by no means unaware of the Mexicans.

It was perhaps completely coincidental, vis-a-vis Brittain's Hospital cartoons, that in January 1942 André Biéler, the organizer of the Kingston Conference and one of Canada's staunchest proponents of the reintegration of the artist into society,<sup>53</sup> travelled to Saint John to deliver a lecture on the subject of the Mexican mural movement.<sup>54</sup> The address was sponsored by the Saint John Art Club and the Maritime Art Association. Brittain was a member of both of these groups, and at the time of the lecture was hard at work on the Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons. Whether or not he had a hand in organizing Biéler's appearance is unknown.<sup>55</sup> However, even if he had nothing to do with it, Biéler's enthusiasm for his topic may be commemorated in the cartoons.

Questions of nationalism and regionalism must also be considered in any evaluation of the influence of the Mexican muralists on Brittain's cartoons. The repudiation of the term "nationalism" in the context of Canadian art has been proposed by recent writers.<sup>56</sup> Nationalism, the objectification and adulation of a political abstraction, is propagandistic in intent.<sup>57</sup> It need not, therefore, deal with actual social, political, or economic realities; myth-making rarely does. Social realist art, too, is essentially propagandistic in nature. In order to be non-propagandistic it must sublimate its attack on existing social, economic, or political conditions, and in so doing become scene painting. Scene painting is characterized by, among other traits, its interest in local history, events, and personages. It tends, in short, toward a regionalist character. Local fact, not idealistic abstraction, dominates regionalism.



Nationalism, and thus social realism, was appropriate to the art of the Mexican Revolution, and for that reason was evoked in the Mexican mural renaissance. The abstracted linear patterning that dominates the murals by Rivera and his compatriots parallels in its abstractness the essentially intangible nature of national political aspirations. Perhaps the single greatest miscalculation on the part of the organizers and participants of the Kingston Conference was their assumption that what had worked in geographically, politically, and socially homogeneous Mexico would also work in Canada. André Biéler was correct in his observation that

the comparatively simple racial pattern of Mexico and its rich artistic background have enabled that country to develop a strong national art much before us in Canada and even before the United States.<sup>58</sup>

Biéler's error lay in his assumption that a similar nationalism could be founded in Canada. Miller Brittain's art testifies to the fact that the diversity of Canada negates the possibility of any coherent nationalist concept, and argues instead in favour of the idea of national awareness based on the accumulation and juxtapositioning of regionalist sensibilities. These sensibilities had gained importance during the Depression, when the study of art in Paris and London became economically unfeasible for most. The particularity of the figures in the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons, their accumulation of detail, and the arrangement of the figures into composed groups rather than their subjugation under patterns of generalized

abstraction, are all characteristics of regionalist art, and necessarily militate against the sense of overwhelming power and ethical absoluteness (i.e., ethical abstraction) upon which the nationalist art of Rivera is premised. In the end, these formal devices deny validity to attempts to read the Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons as social realist documents. Observed reality, not symbolic intent, dominates them.

The inescapable conclusion of all the foregoing is that Miller Brittain must have been aware of the Mexican influence in New York, even if he did not share the artists' socio-politically radical stance. However, allusion has already been made to a sense of social injustice in the Tuberculosis Hospital cartoons, or at least to the need implied in them for improved living standards. To understand fully the background of this sensibility it is necessary to appreciate the role played in the cartoons by the thought of Norman Bethune.

#### Origins of the Cartoons: Dr. Norman Bethune

The subject of tuberculosis treatment in Canada during the 1930's and 1940's is inextricably linked with the name of Norman Bethune (1890-1939). By the early 1930's the Canadian doctor's reputation had been permanently established by his position as Chief of Thoracic Surgery at the Sacré-Coeur Hospital in Cartierville, Québec. Brittain's accessible correspondence is mute on the subject of Bethune. Nonetheless, the doctor's fame in the field of tuberculosis treatment was of sufficient greatness<sup>59</sup> that any discussion of the cartoons

should entertain at least the possibility of a connection.

The late Mrs. Collins, the wife of the Medical Director of the Tuberculosis Hospital in Saint John, recalled in an interview that her husband and his colleagues had built the Hospital in order to provide facilities for the performance of the surgical operation shown in one of the cartoons created by Brittain.<sup>60</sup> This operation<sup>61</sup> had been developed by Bethune, with whom the Hospital personnel were, according to Mrs. Collins, in close contact. It is in this regard that the aforementioned reference to Dr. Collins temporarily halting work on the cartoon in December 1941, until he had "time to go over the historical background" of the mural theme with Brittain<sup>62</sup> becomes especially revelatory. Another possible Bethune-Brittain connection is suggested by the fact that, as a tuberculosis patient in 1926-27, Bethune had himself created a series of mammoth mural designs based on the theme of tuberculosis.<sup>63</sup> Finally, it should be remembered that at least two of Brittain's artist-friends, Paraskeva Clark and Pegi Nicol MacLeod, were active in Bethune's Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.<sup>64</sup>

From the 1930's to the advent of World War I, tuberculosis had been characterized by Sir William Osler as "a social disease with a medical aspect."<sup>65</sup> This approach failed to survive the War, due in part to the need for highly refined diagnostic techniques to differentiate the tubercular soldiers from those suffering from other ailments. This in turn necessitated a reorganization of the concept of the sanatorium. The Military Hospitals Commission in Canada had struck an agreement with existing sanatoria that tubercular soldiers sta-

tioned in the area of a specific sanatorium would be treated there, and this resulted in a sharp increase in the number of patients entering these institutions.<sup>66</sup> The federal government accordingly poured more funds into existing facilities.<sup>67</sup> Much of this money was spent on laboratories and on radiographic, surgical, and dental facilities. The net result of this spending splurge was the metamorphosis of tuberculosis from a social disease with a medical aspect to a primarily medical disease, insofar as it was combatted on a bacteriological level by trained specialists rather than being the responsibility of humanitarian groups armed only with Osler's dictum of "fresh air, good food, good houses and hope."<sup>68</sup> This entire change in approach constitutes only one aspect of the general shift in western societies from a religious and social approach to world problems, to a technological and scientific one.

However, there was a price to be paid for this shift in approach. It tended to relegate social services and relief work to groups that, being composed largely of volunteer, non-scientifically skilled humanitarian workers, were seen as non-essential forces in the struggle against a medically concrete phenomenon: the tubercle bacillus. Thus, as Canada slipped into the squalor and poverty of the Great Depression, attempts to reduce the number of tuberculosis sufferers through an amelioration of the physical conditions in which the disease thrived became increasingly secondary in importance in the eyes of the Canadian medical establishment.

Norman Bethune himself was a staunch advocate of technological progress. He designed a large number of new operating instruments

that were subsequently manufactured and widely used. He especially favoured the techniques of artificial pneumothorax and thoracoplasty, the enforced resting of the diseased lung through causing its collapse by means of the injection of air into the surrounding chest cavity, and achieved remarkable results.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, however, (and herein resides much of what made him unique in his field), he attacked poverty and squalor as the great breeding grounds of the disease. Where most of his colleagues were concerned solely with eliminating the source of infection, he emphasized the bolstering of the individual's resistance to tuberculosis. "Any scheme to cure tuberculosis which does not consider man as a whole, as the resultant of environmental strains and stresses," he wrote, "is bound to fail."<sup>70</sup>

Bethune's position remained a minority one, and came to seem decreasingly important toward the end of the 1930's, by which time the bacteriological approach to the disease had accomplished a great deal. His active involvement in socialist and communist groups further undermined his acceptability, if not his credibility as a physician. Miller Brittain's Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital mural cartoons must be seen against this background.

It is surely of significance that the tuberculosis bacillus, the tangible and specific target of the medical profession at the time the cartoons were executed, seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle.<sup>71</sup> Although it is certainly true that the bacillus itself would hardly constitute suitable imagery for cartoons measuring some 110" x 100" each (unless it were to be disguised in a symbolic representation, as in Bethune's own mural designs of 1927), Brittain's insistence on

dealing with purely socio-economic conditions, especially poverty and filth, in his treatment of the causes of the disease acts in large measure to downplay the validity of the medical profession's accepted opinions. The implication that tuberculosis was seen by Brittain as a principally social disease is inescapable, and in this regard his thinking would have been aligned with that of Bethune. An excerpt from a 1936 speech by Bethune provides a telling verbal counterpart to Brittain's cartoons:

What we have here is an ethical and moral problem in the field of social and political economics, and not medical economics alone. Medicine must be seen as part of the social structure. It is the product of any given social environment.<sup>72</sup>

Although the artist did not hear this speech, it is certainly possible that Hospital personnel, due to their close connection with Bethune, would have been familiar with it. They were, in any case, undoubtedly familiar with an earlier article published by the doctor in the Canadian Medical Association Journal:

...External environmental forces...pre-dispose to infection and re-infection. Poverty, poor food, unsanitary surroundings, contact with infectious foci, overwork and mental strain...Essential and radical readjustments of these are problems for the economists and sociologists.<sup>73</sup>

Cancellation of the Tuberculosis Hospital Commission:

The exact reasons why the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital mural

project was cancelled in 1942 remain unknown. The general concensus is that the Hospital simply exhausted the funds from which Brittain was being paid.<sup>74</sup> This is the most straightforward and, in many respects, the most logical conclusion. Saint John in 1942 was still reeling from the effects of four decades of economic depression. Brittain had already been told by Hospital personnel that he was fortunate to have an opportunity to work on the murals,<sup>75</sup> given the economic climate in New Brunswick. His offer to execute them for a low price lends further credence to the supposition that little money was available. He wrote in February 1942, "[I] feel it my duty to be distressed because the hospital hasn't paid me for anything since the last of October."<sup>76</sup>

However, it has been suggested that the reasons for the cancellation of the commission were deeper.<sup>77</sup> If there is any truth to this supposition, it is conceivable that tight finances may have been used as a convenient excuse to put a stop to Brittain's work. Although it seems somewhat unlikely that the Hospital would have prevaricated for at least four months (October 1941 to February 1942) while it suspended payment without telling Brittain that his cartoons were philosophically unacceptable, such a scenario is possible. In October the Hospital would only recently have discovered what Brittain's preliminary designs looked like. The suspension of work in December may have been engineered by Hospital officials in an attempt to redirect Brittain's work away from its extensive depiction of urban poverty in a city that was probably intended to represent Saint John. Seen in this light, the reason given for the work stoppage, to discuss the

historical background of the theme with Brittain, takes on a potentially new meaning. So, too, in this regard, do the deviations between the original plan for the mural and Brittain's design come to be seen as a possible explanation of any uneasiness the Hospital Board may have been feeling as the artist's work progressed.

The cartoons are very graphic in their revelation of the desperate side of urban life. Civic pride could not help but suffer when confronted with such murals, one-half of which focussed on the sociological and economic causes of tuberculosis. The actual treatment of the disease, a sub-theme which seems originally to have enjoyed somewhat greater prominence in the projected design, is reduced to three cartoons. Besides hurting civic pride, the cartoons may have caused unrest on the part of hospital staff members who did not relish working in large areas dominated by monumental murals apparently intent on emphasizing dirt and misery. Norman Bethune had been the original inspiration for the Hospital administrators in commissioning the mural cartoons, but Brittain may well have placed more emphasis on Bethune's theories than they had envisaged.<sup>78</sup>

Recollections about whether or not Brittain enjoyed working on the cartoons vary, and respondents' recollections are all somewhat hazy after the passage of more than forty years.<sup>79</sup> It is significant that no one remembers the artist being downright enthusiastic about the project, while some recall having the impression that he chafed to varying degrees under the work.<sup>80</sup> Again, this suggests, but certainly does not prove, that Brittain's relationship with Hospital officials may have been tense.



Barry Lord's attempt to identify the cancellation of the commission as being the result of socialist or pseudo-socialist messages embedded in the cartoons, while not without some conceivable bases of support, seems unconvincing.<sup>81</sup> Brittain's political convictions can hardly be described as having been ardently or even consistently left-wing. Socially aware though the cartoons obviously are, there is little in them, or in the artist's background, to imply political aims.<sup>82</sup>

All this aside, however, any nervousness that the Hospital Board may have experienced would have been completely understandable. Brittain was known to be familiar with the revolutionary art of the Mexican muralists, especially Diego Rivera, whose involvement in the Rockefeller affair had made it a cause célèbre.<sup>83</sup> Those not already aware of the unsubtle intentions of the murals of Rivera and his countrymen had been disabused of their innocence by André Biéler's lecture on that subject in Saint John in January 1942.

Nor was Norman Bethune blameless, even in the eyes of the Canadian medical community. Despite the fact that the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital had been designed in accordance with Bethune's thought, there were aspects of his beliefs that cannot have been easily digested, if they were digested at all, by many or all of the Hospital Board members. Bethune's attack on the social conditions that fostered tuberculosis as a widespread disease had led him during the 1930's to criticize first the concept of private medicine,<sup>87</sup> and later the very systems of government which allowed those conditions and that practice to exist. His 1936 speech, from which excerpts were quoted above, is relevant in this regard:

Every social structure has an economic base, and in Canada this economic base is called capitalism avowedly founded on individualism competition and private profit. But this system of capitalism is undergoing an economic crisis - a deadly disease requiring systematic treatment. And here a problem presents itself with special urgency. There are those who are trying to treat the systematic disease as if it is only a temporary illness. They are doomed to failure.<sup>85</sup>

Bethune was becoming more closely identified with economic and political socialism and communism in 1936. By 1942 the identification was complete.<sup>86</sup>

The Brittain cartoons concerned specifically with the cause of tuberculosis are not the only ones from the series in which can be discerned possible references to Bethune. For example, the cartoon showing the formerly tubercular figures now shining with health and confidence adopts a "striding into the bright future" composition frequently associated with socialist or with otherwise propagandistic art. The clarity and potential symbolic intention of this device are, if not necessarily consciously intended by Brittain, at least straightforward and immediately clear.<sup>87</sup> Fears of socialist proselytizing may have been awakened by the prominence of the spade-carrying labourer in the centre of this cartoon, as well as in the centre of the cartoon contrasting the slum on the right with the healthy family on the left.

Thus, the thematic and iconographic potential for direct references to Bethune's political theories does exist in Brittain's cartoons, just as echoes of the Mexican artists' use of art as a catalyst

for social change and of the American muralists' belief in the essentially populist basis of great art can be linked to attitudinal elements in the Tuberculosis Hospital mural plans. The very subject which Brittain had been commissioned to paint, the causes and cure of tuberculosis, necessarily require the criticism of existing urban hygiene conditions. Working within these considerations, however, the artist produced cartoons of a remarkably restrained character, and their areas of compositional and draughtsmanly awkwardness bear witness to Brittain's discomfort with the commission. Just how restrained they are can be seen by comparing them to any mural painted by Diego Rivera, for example. Brittain's cartoons are better seen as a synthesis of ideas derived from various sources than as a clear exposition of any particular ideological stance.<sup>88</sup>

Chapter 5  
WORLD WAR II

Brittain was accepted into the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1942, and served as a bomb-aimer on a Halifax III bomber flying out of the No. 78 Squadron base at Brighton, Yorkshire, in 1944 and 1945. Shortly before the end of the European hostilities he joined the War Art programme administered by the Canadian government. He was decommissioned in mid-1946.

The artist's letters, artwork, and behaviour throughout his months of active service are revealing of both Brittain's spiritual development and his attitude toward social problems. His involvement in World War II proved to be of lasting importance in his life; the sheer horror of the War, compounded by his own role in it, brought Brittain's spirituality to its most highly evolved point, primarily because it forced him to confront basic questions about good, evil, and suffering. These questions had been implicit in the social and economic realities of Saint John during the Depression, but in such a comparatively subtle form that the artist had not been driven beyond the philosophy of the Oxford Group when faced with them. His exploration of the Book of Job, and of the ideas of William Blake and Joyce Cary, was fuelled by the emotional and philosophical intensity of the War. As Brittain became more deeply involved in questions of such universal scope, however, his unwillingness to commit himself to immediate social or political issues remained unchanged.

Brittain attempted to enlist in the R.C.A.F. as early as 1939,

with the hope of becoming a photographer.<sup>2</sup> He submitted a formal application on October 24 and, despite the support of Pilot Officer W.P. Sprenger (Officer in Charge of Recruiting, Moncton),<sup>3</sup> the application was rejected on November 27.<sup>4</sup> Brittain was more successful in July 1942. In that month he was enlisted into the R.C.A.F. and given the rank of Aircraftman Second Class (AC2).<sup>5</sup> He was subsequently sent to No. 16 Recruiting Centre in Halifax (August 24-October 18) and then to No. 5 Manning Depot in Lachine, Québec, arriving there on October 19. He was assessed as being suitable for service as a member of an aircrew, and underwent the mixture of drill and study considered requisite for the training of aircrewmen before he was posted away to No. 12 Equipment Depot in Montréal three months later, on January 21, 1943. From there he went to No. 3 Initial Training School, located in Victoriaville, Québec, where he remained from February 7 until April 18, 1943.

The initial training school was the first of three schools attended by pilot trainees. Successful graduates went on to an elementary flying training school, and finally to a service flying training school.<sup>6</sup> While at Victoriaville, Brittain was cleared for actual flight training. He was promoted to the rank of Leading Aircraftman (LAC) on April 17, on which day he was moved to No. 11 Elementary Flying Training School at Cap-de-la-Madeleine, Québec. On April 20, two days after this posting, he flew for the first time in his life. He handled the controls only for "a brief minute," but that brief minute confirmed him in his intense desire to be a pilot.

All along I have wondered how it [flying] would affect me and what a relief it was to-day to find I take to it easily and naturally. I felt so happy I couldn't keep a grin off my face - Such a feeling of complete freedom I have seldom experienced. Now that I have been broken in I am more anxious than ever to be a pilot. To tell you the truth the reason I tried up to now was that I thought pilot was the hardest thing to attain but now I have a new reason. It is because I love to fly.<sup>7</sup>

As training progressed, however, Brittain became increasingly nervous about his flying skills.<sup>8</sup> His concern was well-placed. On May 19, immediately prior to his scheduled solo test flight, he flew his final instructor-accompanied flights, and made two poor landings. He blamed his tenseness for his problems in the air, which included the very serious error of levelling his aircraft out at some thirty-five (instead of twenty) feet in preparation for one of his landings. Despite Brittain's pleading, his instructor refused to let him solo and, along with 35% of the airmen in his course, he was washed out of pilot training.<sup>9</sup> He was sent back to Lachine (May 22-June 15, 1943) to await posting to a new course, which he hoped would be for bombardier.<sup>10</sup>

Brittain reported to No. 5 Bombing and Gunnery School, near Fingal, Ontario, on June 16 to learn to aim and drop bombs from Anson and Bolingbroke aircraft. He remained there for the regulation twelve weeks (until September 18),<sup>11</sup> after which time he was posted to No. 1 Air Observer School in Malton, Ontario for six weeks. There he continued to train in Ansons, flying with navigators, practising map read-

ing, giving information to the navigator in flight, and dropping bombs.<sup>12</sup> Although Brittain's first preference had been to become a pilot, he performed well in the demanding courses of the Air Observer School, and may have been somewhat consoled by the knowledge that bomb-aimers and pilots were paid at the same rate.<sup>13</sup>

On October 29, 1943, following the successful completion of his six-week training period at No. 1 Air Observer School, Leading Aircraftman Miller Gore Brittain received his Air Bomber flying badge, and enjoyed a leave prior to being posted overseas. He sailed from Halifax on November 24 and landed in the United Kingdom on December 1.

Although certified as an Air Bomber, Brittain was lacking in combat training. At No. 10 (Observer) Advanced Flying Unit, in Dumfries, Scotland, he studied battle skills from February 22 to March 28, 1944. This was followed by similar training at No. 20 Operational Training Unit in Lossiemouth, Scotland (March 28-June 23), where he trained in Wellington bombers. "I think I understand why the English are such ardent explorers," Brittain wrote on February 29. "They are looking for sunshine."<sup>14</sup> However, despite his complaints about the rain and cold, he clearly enjoyed his time in the United Kingdom. He is remembered today by those who knew him then as one of the many combatants who hated the War but loved their work.<sup>15</sup> The camaraderie and the sense of being part of the War effort buoyed up his spirits. "I am with a very fine bunch of Canadians [at Dumfries] and have no complaints," he wrote in an early, but typical, letter. "You have no idea how much this experience means to me."<sup>16</sup>

At Lossiemouth Brittain became part of an air crew consisting

of himself, pilot Jack Whitney Fraser from Toronto,<sup>17</sup> navigator James Victor Reynolds from North Bay, Ontario, wireless operator Paddy Reynolds from Hampstead Heath,<sup>18</sup> and two air gunners.<sup>19</sup> In a rare reference to painting the artist noted (May 4, 1944) that he was very anxious to do a group portrait of his aircrew, although he had so far done only the mental planning for it.<sup>20</sup> What few references to art are to be found in Brittain's War letters do little to illuminate his opinions on either spirituality or social awareness.

The aircrew was finally posted to No. 78 Squadron at Brighton, in Yorkshire.<sup>21</sup> This was an R.A.F. unit. From there Brittain flew his first bombing mission on August 25, 1944.<sup>22</sup> Initially he did not dislike these missions. "I used to hate training but I am enjoying this," he wrote following his second mission.

There is great satisfaction in dropping a load on Jerry and it makes all these weary months seem almost worthwhile... Today there was not a bit of flak and I was actually able to see my bombs... burst on the target.<sup>23</sup>

Brittain and his crew flew a total of thirty-six missions,<sup>24</sup> the last of them on February 23, 1945. He had begun seriously to consider the possibility of applying for War Artist status in the autumn of 1944. He wrote to H.O. McCurry, then Chairman of the Canadian War Artists Committee, indicating both his determination to finish his tour of duty (the wisdom of which desire was appreciated by Carl Schaefer, a war artist not on active duty<sup>25</sup>), and his hope that he would be taken into the War Art programme only at the conclusion of



his tour of duty:

I was flattered to be included [on the panel of artists being considered for the war records programme] but felt it was not for me till I had tasted war in the air....Now I have tasted war in the air....I shall have to survive fourteen more [bombing missions] to complete a tour and it is about if and when I complete my tour that I am writing to you. Normally the procedure is to send those who are 'screened', out to training stations as instructors or to fill any odd ground job that can be found. Many Canadians are now being sent home when screened. None of this appeals to me. After I finish I should like to be taken on as a war artist by the R.C.A.F. I know it from the ground up. I know all about operations....It is because I know the Air Force from the inside that I appeal to you for this opportunity.<sup>26</sup>

However, McCurry misunderstood Brittain's request, and assumed that the artist wished to be removed from operational duty immediately and be reassigned as a War Artist. He accordingly set the wheels for this procedure in motion by strongly recommending the reassignment, arranging to have this information cabled to London. He also contacted Vincent Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, and Air Marshal Lloyd Breadner, Air Officer Commanding, R.C.A.F. Overseas, describing Brittain to the latter as a "thoroughly competent artist with...a remarkable background of service." McCurry clearly regarded Brittain's operational experience as an asset:

...Most of our war artists were forbidden to go on operational flights, and we have a preponderance of uninteresting ground records.<sup>27</sup>

Brittain reiterated his stance in a December 22, 1944 letter to McCurry,<sup>28</sup> and arrangements to have him removed from active duty were subsequently scrapped. However, while he was still flying bombing missions, the Canadian Overseas Artists Control Committee evaluated samples of his art, and interviewed him at Committee headquarters in London.<sup>29</sup> Following his final mission, he was posted to the History Section of R.C.A.F. Headquarters at Lincoln's Inn Fields, London on March 23, 1945.<sup>30</sup> He was given a private studio nearby, close to the studios occupied by War Artists Aba Bayefsky and Paul Goranson.<sup>31</sup>

The images that Brittain recorded while a member of No. 78 Squadron, and later as a war artist, are significant for the degree of continuity they establish with his portraits and street scenes from Saint John. There was an art club at the Squadron station. He spent "quite a bit of free time" there: "I haven't lost much in two years which is a great surprise and relief."<sup>32</sup> His earliest reference to himself as having produced an artwork of any kind in England was made on October 1, 1944, when he noted that he had executed a portrait drawing of his navigator.<sup>33</sup> With art supplies readily available, and with the very poor flying weather in Yorkshire in November and December forcing the aircrews to spend an unaccustomed amount of time on the ground,<sup>34</sup> Brittain began to do a thriving business drawing portraits of his fellow-airmen.<sup>35</sup>

No pastels or paintings from this period have yet been found,<sup>36</sup> and Brittain further seems to have restricted himself to portraits rather than to genre scenes, for example. A friend's recollection

that the artist worked at this time on a series of the Stations of the Cross in a local church is completely undocumented.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, the artist seems to have avoided scenes of battle entirely. In December 1944 he wrote to H.O. McCurry:

I wonder how far it is possible for a person like me who am fundamentally interested in human beings to capture the sinister fairy land of a target on canvas or paper. I know you will want me to speak with an authentic voice and so will leave the result to me. My present reactions are very remote from those of adventurer - or a crusader. But with a few weeks 'away from it all' I am confident my perspective will clarify.<sup>38</sup>

This must have disconcerted McCurry somewhat, as he had recently supported Brittain's application for war artist status because most World War II art produced to date had been by artists who, having never been in combat, were forced to deal only with ground subjects.<sup>39</sup> Brittain's pre-War reluctance to deal critically with his subject matter, the references in his letters to the humanity and nobility of ordinary people, and the portraits that he drew at No. 78 Squadron were developing into a pattern. Even after completing twenty-four day and night missions over enemy territory he was unsure of his willingness and ability to depict scenes of destruction.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, Brittain was experiencing problems assimilating the cool, observational nature of his art with the harsh, involved reality that he had experienced as a bomb-aimer. He confessed to his parents shortly after receiving his War Artist commission, "Apparently I am not expected to turn out much of importance for a month [because of the

delay in getting supplies] which is a good thing, for while I can still draw, I find the effect of the past three years has done something to my ideas."<sup>41</sup> To friends, he wrote:

My work is going fairly well but I am not at all satisfied. I find it easy enough to draw figures etc. but the extra something that a good picture must have is yet to come.<sup>42</sup>

On June 17, 1945, Brittain was at last able to report that his work was "beginning to show signs of life."<sup>43</sup> In early July he announced a breakthrough: "I have completed two large drawings more or less in my old manner and have started on a third. Things are going O.K."<sup>44</sup>

During late 1945 and early 1946, plans to send the Canadian war artists home were progressing.<sup>45</sup> Brittain finally sailed on September 4, 1945.<sup>46</sup> He spent one month, September 11 to October 12, at the Release Centre in Dartmouth before being posted to Air Force Headquarters in Ottawa, from which he was soon relocated (October 23) to No. 1 Composite Training School on Eglinton Avenue in Toronto, along with Aba Bayefsky, Albert Cloutier, Charles Goldhamer (the officer in Charge), and Carl Schaefer. He left No. 1 Composite Training School on July 23, 1946, and was discharged from the R.C.A.F. three days later. After a brief stay at No. 2 Release Centre in Lachine, he returned to Saint John.

The work produced by Brittain in Toronto consisted almost exclusively of scenes of daily activity on No. 78 Squadron's base.<sup>47</sup> He worked primarily from memory, relying upon few props or field sketches.<sup>48</sup> This did not present a problem, as he rarely used mechanical or tech-

nological imagery in his art, and therefore had little need for reference sketches. In this respect Brittain differed from the other artists at the School. They dealt often with the human figure, but he dealt with it almost to the complete exclusion of all else. This also lowered the historical and reportorial value of his work, since he could thus create scenes that maintained their emotional connotations even if substantial details were altered in the effort to convey the basically abstract qualities of comradeship, sorrow, ennui, and forced joviality.

The humanistic orientation of Brittain's subject matter in his War art suggests the possibility that he avoided scenes of bombs dropping for reasons of suppressed guilt. However, although such a theory possibly plays some sort of role in his War art, it should not be overstressed. The intense emotional expression of the post-War Biblical and the later extremely personal paintings, particularly those done after the death of the artist's wife in 1958, deny the notion that Brittain could simply dismiss unpleasant emotional reactions, banishing them from his art in a desperate attempt to escape a reality that was too emotionally charged or contradictory to accept. Rather, his choice of subject matter seems to have derived in part from his past work as an artist, and in part from what the War had represented to him. Working as a bomb-aimer, Brittain was somewhat removed from the immediate horror of destruction, and was thus able almost to dissociate the pyrotechnical displays, seen from his position in the Halifax III bomber, from the firestorms begun and fuelled by the bombs. Indeed, he remarked several times on the visual beauty inherent in

exploding bombs seen from a height at night. For example:

The targets are really beautiful at night. You never saw fireworks like that at the Saint John Exhibition. Jerry sends up something to scare us that is the most beautiful of all. A great red flare bursts and out of it come long silver streamers, like some sort of enchanted tree.... Emerging from [i.e., flying above] the clouds I thought of Alice going through the looking glass. All about us was a different world. I have never seen anything to equal that night.<sup>49</sup>

Or again:

The night attacks although they are deadly are very beautiful from our point of view. The target is like an enormous lighted Christmas tree twenty miles away but straight beneath one looks like pictures I have seen of the mouth of hell.<sup>50</sup>

The imagery employed ranges in nature from the joyous (Christmas trees), to the festive (fireworks), to the horrific (the mouth of hell). The inclusion of horrific imagery convinces the reader of Brittain's letters that he was not cheerfully deluding himself about events on the ground, but at the same time those events had no clearly defined reality for him. Instant destruction on a widespread geographical scale is not easily imagined, and less easily believed. The demolition of a city and the almost instantaneous murder of its inhabitants achieves a concretely comprehensible existence only for those in situ. The artist/bomb-aimer had not experienced the Blitz and was, in his Halifax III bomber, so physically removed from the consequences of

his actions that their impact on him was primarily visual. The comparison of the bomb fires to something already known and comprehended, the fireworks at the Saint John Exhibition, evokes only partly a conscious attempt to deny a clear and present reality. It is more strongly reminiscent of an attempt to grasp the nature of something unknown by linking it with the known. The difference between two concepts, the denial of knowledge and the attempt to grasp knowledge, is fundamental.

The similarity of this situation to Brittain's reaction to the victims of social and economic pressures in Saint John before the War is remarkable. In neither case was Brittain deluding himself into believing that reality was more pleasant than it seemed. Yet, in both cases, he was simply too far removed from actual conditions to be able to comprehend fully their seriousness. In Saint John his Loyalist background and other factors kept him firmly rooted as a possessor of social awareness rather than a social conscience. In the Halifax III bomber, he was separated from the truth by physical distance rather than mental distance, but the end result was the same in both cases. The distancing, whether mental or physical, made his treatment of his subjects reminiscent of the work of Kenneth Hayes Miller: he emphasized the fine arts potential of his subjects, losing much of their original impact behind an aesthetic veil.

This is most clearly seen in Brittain's sole known view of a genuine scene of destruction: Night Target, Germany (1946; mixed media on masonite; Canadian War Museum). In this painting the white searchlights constitute an abstract pattern, punctuated by red marker flares,

that is of interest in its own right. The scene features all the elements typical of a night bombing but remains to a large extent rhetorical, conventional, and visual rather than gripping, convincing, and emotional. Brittain himself was unhappy with the painting:

My target picture looks like the real thing they say, but I don't like it yet as a picture. In fact at the moment I feel like putting my foot through it.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that Brittain delayed painting Night Target, Germany until 1946 implies the sense of emotional remove that characterizes the picture. Most telling, however, is the artist's own description of the scene on which the painting was based.

It was terrible, it was wicked, and it's true, there was a certain fascinating beauty to it. A German city under bombing often looked like a casket of jewels opening up, in some Walt Disney film, but there was no inspiration there.<sup>52</sup>

In a similar letter written shortly before VE Day, Brittain considered the suitability of the concentration camps as subject matter:

I think they should turn the war artists loose on the concentration camps as they are a terrible indictment against war, but I believe my own job for the present should be to mull over my own experiences in Bomber Command.<sup>53</sup>

Although H.O. McCurry had thought that Brittain's combat experience would result in the most dynamic paintings of the War, the artist



dealt less with the trappings of that conflict than many others who had been forbidden to take part in the actual fighting. Their art is often more illuminating in a reportorial sense. Brittain's best War art, his drawings of daily activities around the Squadron base, are essentially private images and are thus not in keeping with the reportorial purposes of the War Art programme. His physically and emotionally tangible wartime experiences restricted to training, daily routine, and bombing missions that were physically separated from the devastation that they affected, Brittain naturally seems to have equated the War from his perspectives with rather mundane occurrences. Physical and emotional stimuli are inevitably more immediate and real to the individual than are situations which evoke only or principally visual stimuli, and for this reason the War seems to have been most immediate for Brittain in its home base manifestations rather than in actual combat.

The tragedy of the War appears most clearly not in the devastation of Night Target, Germany, but in the artist's depiction of the effects of the death of a comrade on men who have returned from a mission: 'G' George Didn't Come Back (1945; conté; Canadian War Museum). Here, safe in their barracks, Brittain's airmen friends grapple with a tragedy that is personal rather than public. The immediacy and importance of the occasion is emphasized by the self-portrait figure seated on the bed.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Brittain's face can be found in all of his War art drawings. The grotesque side of war and of military life is strongly grasped in Sam Wakes Us Up (1945; conté; Canadian War Museum). Sam, unreal in his rotundity and sinister in the ambivalent

enjoyment with which he moves among the bunks of the more physically diminutive and humanly believable airmen, brings to this drawing a nightmare quality which, aside from the subject matter, has nothing to do with the reality of war.

The intensity and uncomfortably grotesque quality of Sam Wakes Us Up is, however, as rare in Brittain's War art as are examples of genuine emotional involvement in his Saint John street scenes. The psychological distancing so characteristic of him when faced with unpleasant socio-economic facts, and vanquished in the 1930's only in the individual portraits of people he knew well, continued when he was forced to deal with the reality of war.<sup>55</sup> Like the portraits of the 1930's, the most successful of the War pictures are those of Brittain's fellow-crewmen. In them is the strongest visual evidence of the artist's increasing interest in the idea that mankind gains in nobility through the trial of suffering.

This same idea is at the core of the art of one of the very few artists whose work Brittain praised while in England: Henry Moore. He wrote that Moore "interests me profoundly,"<sup>56</sup> and certainly had opportunity to view that artist's work in London. For example, thirteen sculptures and twenty-two drawings were shown at the Berkeley Galleries in 1945. Nine sculptures and sixty-four drawings were at the Leicester Galleries in 1946.<sup>57</sup> Aside from these solo exhibitions, Moore's art was in the collections of a number of institutions, including the Leicester Galleries, Battersea Park, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate Gallery, and the Imperial War Museum.<sup>58</sup> Several of his drawings were purchased by the War

Artists' Advisory Committee, which distributed them to museums in London and other centres.<sup>59</sup> He enjoyed great popularity among members of the public.<sup>60</sup> His tube drawings (1940-41) had become widely-recognized symbols of wartime London, and were included in exhibitions organized by the War Artists' Advisory Committee at the National Gallery throughout the War.<sup>61</sup>

Brittain thus had access to Moore's art, especially the drawings.<sup>62</sup> He must have been impressed with the convincing sense of swelling form achieved in them, an aspect of drawing stressed by both Harry Wickey and Kenneth Hayes Miller. Already evident in Brittain's own work, it appears with even greater force and conviction in such figures as Sam and the awakening man in the foreground of Sam Wakes Us Up. Here, as in Moore's drawings, long sinuous lines wrap themselves around underlying forms, with shadows being established by means of cross-hatching in varying degrees of density. His later paintings, such as Odalisque (1955; mixed media on masonite; private collection) sometimes employ abstracted human forms punctuated with Moore-like holes.<sup>63</sup>

Aside from this purely formal device, Brittain would also have been taken with the compassion and sensitivity of the subject matter of the tube drawings, and Moore's sympathetic approach to "the group sense of communion in apprehension."<sup>64</sup> The drawings have been described as "visionary, not in the religious sense of the word, but in the interpretation of a deeply felt, highly imaginative experience."<sup>65</sup> One suspects that Brittain was primarily attracted by Moore's humanism, just as he had been drawn to Harry Wickey for similar reasons; the

fact that he claimed to be "profoundly" interested in Moore implies that he was intrigued by more than mere technique, for example. The contrast between photographs<sup>66</sup> of these sleepers, and Moore's abstracted drawings, is significant. As was the case with Brittain's Saint John street scenes, Moore's tube drawings use a number of devices, including the blurring out of individual faces, to edge an initially pathetic scene into the realm of poetry. Brittain's appreciation of Moore's art thus unites the issues of social consciousness and spirituality: he was swept up by Moore's great sympathy for the figures in these drawings, and yet their "visionary," universalizing quality serve to lift them rather beyond the grimy reality of sleeping in subway tunnels.

Finally, Brittain's personal experiences during World War II seem to have fostered his development of a strong sense of spirituality. Like many others, the War appalled him. He began to drink heavily.<sup>67</sup> As early as June 1944 he complained of severe strain.<sup>68</sup> Charles Goldhamer was so shocked at what he perceived as the artist's battered psyche that he urged Brittain to apply to the War Art programme in order to avoid further combat duty.<sup>69</sup> Brittain's very faith in humanity seemed broken. Writing near the end of the War, he stated:

After reading the stories of Buchenwald and Belsen I am afraid I can never think of the Germans of this generation as civilized humans and I do not regret my bombs.<sup>70</sup>

It was at this point that the lessons of Blake, Job, and Cary touched Brittain's condition most closely. Blake's ideas about the

mutual interrelationship and co-existence of good and evil found concrete expression in Brittain's discovery that the War was necessary for future peace. The conception of the transcendence of suffering to achieve a more highly developed state of being was graphically illustrated by the grim determination of the British, for example, to survive the Blitz, or by Janet Webster singing before her death at Belsen. Similarly, as the artist's daughter has speculated, Brittain's subsequent participation in Memorial Day parades may have served to justify to himself the civilian lives ended by his bombs.<sup>71</sup> Only thus could he remind himself that, as Blake had written in "America, A Prophecy," the evil had been necessary for the establishment of a higher, transcendent good.

In summary, Brittain's almost uncontrolled drinking and his shaken faith in humanity hint that World War II had done him some degree of psychological damage, an idea firmly supported by Charles Goldhamer, but it seems unwise to exaggerate the point. These were hardly unique phenomena at the time, and most of Brittain's friends and family members maintain that the War did little permanent damage to his stability. Some believe that, as was true of so many others, Brittain's War years were his happiest: he felt himself to be a necessary part of the achievement of an important goal.<sup>72</sup> In fact, far from destroying Brittain, the War seems to have contributed to his development of a remarkably profound spirituality. His admiration for Henry Moore's art, with its echoes of Blake's and Job's patient acceptance of suffering, recalls on a significantly higher plane the cheery, uncomplicated, innocent humanism of Harry Wickey. His own

jointed sensibilities and his contradictory feelings about the War act out the ideas of Blake, the Book of Job, and Cary.

It is true that the War pictures rarely deal with the suffering of strangers, and that when they do, as in Night Target, Germany, they are usually unsuccessful. This is in part due to Brittain's personality and self-image, carried over from the 1930's. In addition, however, the fact that Brittain drew his own portrait into almost all of his War works is a visual record of the artist's application of the ideas of Job, Blake, and Cary to his own life. Suffering for Brittain, had never been and never would be an objective socio-economic fact to be reported indignantly. It was an intensely personal thing, and a path to greater self-knowledge. The Oxford Group and the detached awareness in the Saint John street scenes are the roots of Brittain's interest in Blake, and his War art. World War II was not a break in Brittain's life. Rather, it represented the culmination of all that had gone before.

## Chapter 6

## CONCLUSION

Brittain's concern with good, evil, and suffering led him naturally into the use of Biblical subject matter beginning in the mid-1940's:

I had been thinking more and more about what went on inside...the people I had been making pictures of and why they did the things they did. I began to concern myself with what I imagined they felt and why they reacted in certain ways to the things that happened to them. So while I was still interested in their outward appearance, I was perhaps even more concerned with their psychological make-up. This led me to ponder on the problems of good and evil. I contemplated the inner conflict that is part of everyman and tried to incorporate into my work such abstract qualities as love, despair, terror and so on, since they are the inevitable experience of everyman and I felt they should be faced and dealt with rather than shrunk from....If the artist feels despair and makes a picture of it, it means he has faced his despair and turned it into a work of art, which is or should be a labour of love, and his mind is purged of despair. This is part of my understanding of Christianity....It was thinking along these lines that led me in many cases to draw my subject matter from the Bible.

Brittain's "sacred" subject matter has an essentially, and paradoxically, humanistic essence.<sup>2</sup> In this way, as the above quotation makes clear, Brittain saw these drawings and paintings as continuing the works of the 1930's and the first half of the 1940's. It is significant that his Biblical figures are seen at crucial moments in

their lives, making decisions or engaging in actions based on deep personal conviction. Christ appears on the Cross, in the Transfiguration, and in the wilderness, battling the temptations of Satan. Lucifer, the Pieta, Adam and Eve, and similar figures are featured in a number of works. All are caught in the midst of decisions or actions so monumental in their scope and implications that they go beyond being Bible stories to become explorations of human moral ideals. This is a move beyond orthodox religious painting insofar as it deals with questions of moral profundity rather than illustrating pre-established and dogmatic lessons from a civilized, rationalized religion. Human passion, not dogma, animates Brittain's Biblical figures, just as human sympathy, not socio-political theorizing, dominates the earlier, less emotionally complete city scenes.

As noted at the end of chapter five, Brittain's thought and art of the 1930's and the first half of the 1940's is best seen as a continuum. To these years can now be added the latter half of the 1940's, with its proliferation of Biblical imagery. The sharp alterations in the artist's subject matter, technique, and personality during the late 1940's conventionally serve to divide his career neatly into two parts. The years ending with the conclusion of World War II are too frequently dismissed as the years of "social realism," while the art from the remaining two decades of his life is usually classified simply as "expressionistic" and "surrealistic." However, the threads of continuity discerned in the previous chapter continue into the latter half of the 1940's, and through the 1950's and 1960's. If, as I have argued, Brittain's thought and art were strongly rooted in philosophi-



cal ideas, one can posit a sense of continuity throughout his life based on a consistency of thought. Further, because his art so closely paralleled the tragedy of his life during the 1950's and 1960's,<sup>3</sup> one can expect some sense of underlying unity in the art. This does not necessarily imply continuous growth in seriousness and importance. Indeed, the increasingly subjective and idiosyncratic nature of the artist's behaviour during his last decade of life seems to have resulted in a less rigorously considered collection of work.

In the late 1950's and throughout the 1960's, Brittain lived in an increasingly disordered and isolated condition imposed by his own behaviour. Whether or not this was the ultimate search for transcendence through personal suffering, at least indirectly, is far too large a question to be answered here, but the possibility would make an interesting study. Just as his 1930's street scenes observe socio-economic suffering without touching the sufferers in any significant way, and just as the World War II drawings consider the value of the suffering of Brittain and his crewmates in a world of inextricably intermingled good and evil, so may the late expressions of agonized introspection be records of the chaotic conflict within one man struggling to sort through concepts he can no longer control. As the artist's interest in social observation dwindled throughout his career, the subjectivity and spiritual seriousness of his thought and art deepened. The key to Brittain's oeuvre may be to see it as a shift away from the placid observation of the exterior world to the introspective probing of his most private self.

FOOTNOTES

## FOOTNOTES: INTRODUCTION

1 "Religion" is here used in the sense of the belief in a divine or superhuman power or principle, usually thought of as the creator of all things, and of the manifestation of such a belief in worship. It assumes the existence of, and adherence to, an organized Church propounding an established dogma. "Spirituality" refers to an interest in that which pertains to or affects the highest or purest moral and intellectual qualities of humanity. It does not presuppose the existence of dogmatic belief.

2 "Social consciousness" is used interchangeably with "social awareness," and refers to a quality of social observation which may or may not extend to protests against social conditions. "Social conscience," when it is used in this thesis, refers to a more active stance of protest and/or social reform. "Socialist consciousness" is used to identify the ideals of a specific political ideology.

3 Galerie Dresdner catalogues are listed in the Bibliography. Some of the errors which recur in them are noted in my footnotes, while others are corrected in the biographical outline in Appendix I.

4 Alex Mogelon, Miller Brittain: In Focus (Toronto: Simon Dresdner Publishers Inc., 1981).

5 Kent Martin, Miller Brittain, National Film Board of Canada, 1981.

6 For Barry Lord's contributions to research on Miller Brittain, see especially his "Miller Brittain's Saint John Hospital Cartoons," artscanada, 24, 6&7 (June/July 1967), unpaginated insert; and The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), pp.183-189. Lord is currently working on a book, tentatively titled Miller Brittain, People's Artist: Pictures of the Working Class, intended to cover the years from 1932 to 1942.

7 This catalogue accompanies an exhibition organized for the Creative Art Centre of the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton) and circulated across Canada in 1968-69. It contains two essays: "Miller G. Brittain: Drawings and Pastels, c.1930-1967" by Andrus, and "Miller Brittain - A Memory" by Luke Rombout.

8 Organized by the Owens Art Gallery, where it was seen from May 10 to June 15, 1981, the exhibition accompanied by this catalogue travelled throughout the Maritimes, and to Hamilton and Victoria, in

1981-82.

9 For example, Andrus (op.cit., p.5) incorrectly states that Brittain studied at the Saint John Vocational School in c.1926, that he exhibited only three times with the Canadian Society of Graphic Art before 1947, and that he was included in a series of four-man exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Toronto in c.1940-41. The same errors are found in the Galerie Dresdnere catalogues. See Appendix I of this thesis for an accurate biographical summary of the artist's early life and career.

10 The only researcher with access to the storage vaults is Murray Barnard of Halifax, a nephew of the artist. His own book on Brittain has been in preparation for several years. He has, understandably, exercised his author's prerogative not to make available the results of his own research until publication.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 1

1 For references to Brittain's post-World War II dislike of painting portraits, see Alex Mogelson, Miller Brittain: In Focus (Toronto: Simon and Schuster Publishers Inc., 1981), p.147. In 1977 the New Brunswick Museum staged a large exhibition of the artist's portraits. Of the 160 works included in the exhibition 124 are dated in the accompanying catalogue (Portraits by Miller Brittain). Of these, 78% were produced during the years covered in this thesis. These include both drawings (sanguin, red chalk, pencil, conté, pastel) and paintings.

2 J. Russell Harper, "The Paintings of Miller Brittain," Miller Brittain - Painter (Sackville, N.B.: Mount Allison University, Owens Art Gallery, 1981), [p.4].

3 See, for example, Graham McInnes' early "Contemporary Canadian Artists, No. 11 - Miller Brittain," Canadian Forum, 17 (December 1937), p. 312, in which he stated that Brittain's drawings were the few true examples of social satire produced by Canadian artists of the day. Reviews of exhibitions of Brittain's art did not begin making a point of rejecting the classification of his art as satirical until comparatively recently. John W. Graham, reviewing Drawings and Pastels, c.1930-1967, by Miller Gore Brittain ("Brittain Best in Portraits," Winnipeg Free Press (May 9, 1969)), argued that:

Unlike most others whose outlook is of a similar order, he was not a satirist but rather was a dispassionate though sympathetic observer....

Robert Ayre wrote about the same exhibition ("Brittain Exhibit at Sir George Williams," Montreal Star (October 29, 1969)):

There is nothing in the exhibition however - nor in the oils as I remember them - to justify calling him, as some have done, "social satirist" or "the Canadian Bruegel [sic]." What stands out, along with the delicacy and accurateness of his drawing, is his gentleness and his affection for people.

Brittain himself, in his undated, unpublished text "My Aims as an Artist," (coll.: CWM) made an oblique attack on the perception of his work as being satirical in spirit:

\* I was more affected by the absurdity of human antics than anything else and so I was labeled a satirist when the pictures were first exhibited.

4 Miller Brittain, quoted in Patricia Starr, "Maritime Art and Miller Brittain" (unpublished Bachelor of Fine Arts essay, Mount Allison University, April 1965), p.12.

5 Mogelon incorrectly refers to Brittain's father as being familiarly known as "James" (op.cit., p.56), when in fact he was known to his wife and friends as "Firth." (Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (Hampton, N.B., December 10, 1983).) Mogelon also misidentifies the maiden name of the artist's mother as "Bartlett" (p.56).

6 Ibid., pp.50-51.

7 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).

8 Brittain listed himself as a non-commercial artist in the 1939 Saint John City Directory, as did Ted Campbell and Jack Humphrey. The only previous advertisement in the Directory for a non-commercial artist had been in 1933.

9 Barry Lord, The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art (Toronto: NC Press, 1974), pp.183-189.

10 Brittain grew up at 206 Winslow Street in West Saint John, close to the harbour, and so longshoremen are the subjects of many of his works. He later had a studio overlooking a liquor store in downtown Saint John.

11 Pegi Nicol, "Miller Brittain," Maritime Art, 1, 4 (April 1941), p.14.

12 For example, the Hayden Street or "Studio Group," founded in Toronto in 1938 and counting some twenty-four artists as members before its demise in 1943, used the human figure for its appropriateness in the exploration of human values and emotions. The group was inspired primarily by war's effect on humanity (Christine Boyanoski, The 1940s: A Decade of Painting in Toronto (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984), p.10). Members had little interest in extending their humanitarian concerns in the direction of political activism.

13 Interview with Aba Bayefsky (Toronto, June 15, 1985).

14 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).

15 The collapse of the New York stock market in 1929 had particularly strong consequences in Canada, where the semi-developed in-

dustrial economic system relied on a thriving foreign trade, and especially on the export of grain, raw materials, and semi-finished products. Something akin to total economic collapse devastated the Prairies and the Maritime provinces. In the latter, the fisheries and the coal-steel industry were hardest hit, and the New Brunswick economy was unable to recover even after Canada had regained many of her foreign export markets. Social disaster swept through the province in the wake of economic ruin. By 1933, 23% of the Canadian labour force was unemployed.

16. Brittain had paid the newsboys 50¢ more than they would otherwise earn, to pose for him. (Jean Sereisky, "Five Points of View," Atlantic Advocate, 56, 7 (March 1965), p.40). Ronald 1939; mixed media on masonite; New Brunswick Museum) is a portrait of a newsboy. (Interview with Erica Deichmann-Gregg (Fredericton, May 4, 1984); J. Russell Harper, op.cit., [p.5]; Elissa Barnard, "Brittain's Strength is Unique Vision, a Power of Evocation," (Halifax) Mail-Star (December 12, 1981).

17. Brittain, op.cit., n.p. This attitude applied not only to the post-World War II years, when "My Aims as an Artist" was written, but also at least as early as 1942, when Brittain delivered an address to the Fredericton Art Club on the topic, "New Directions in Canadian Painting." According to the summary published in the Fredericton Gleaner ("Art Club Met: Miller Brittain of Saint John was Guest Speaker; Study Group Present):

Mr. Brittain said he saw a new direction in art developing between the academic and arbitrarily expressive extremes in direct line with the great tradition.

What is the new direction in art? "For myself," said Mr. Brittain, "it is to interpret life as I see it, and to know it thoroughly in all its aspects. Whether the emphasis be weighted in the direction of psychological or formal considerations, depends on the personality of the artist."

In 1942, then, Brittain believed that art to which he was sympathetic could be either psychological or formal in emphasis, but he made no mention of the possibility that it could be social or political.

18. Brittain, op.cit., n.p.:

I am trying to make line, mass and colour function psychologically. I desire that they intensify the expression of the emotion implicit in the picture than have them emphasize

the character of the things involved.  
The important thing about the Cheshire  
cat in Alice in Wonderland was the grin.  
In my pictures I wish to pay more atten-  
tion to the grin and less to the cat.

19 Ibid., n.p.

20 John W. Graham, op.cit.

21 S.P., "Local Galleries Have New Shows: Water-Colors by John Ruggles at the Artist's - Paintings by Brittain at Binet," New York Times, September 29, 1950, p.31.

22 Interview with Molly Lamb Bobak (Fredericton, December 11, 1983).

23 Harper, op.cit., [p.6].

24 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Joan Brittain Hamilton (Saint John, December 13, 1983), and Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984).

25 Alice Lusk Webster (1880-1953) was born into the New York social elite. A linguist and a connoisseur and patron of art, she was educated in New York, Paris, and Hanover. She translated a number of historic French works, founded and financially supported the Art Department of the New Brunswick Museum, and donated (amongst other items) an extensive collection of decorative arts and an art library to that institution. With her husband, John Clarence Webster (1863-1950), she was the principal source of financing for the New Brunswick Museum.

26 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983). Brittain's "quite conservative" nature is not universally acknowledged. Kay Smith, a close friend during the 1930's, states:

I certainly don't think he was interested in politics. I'm sure if he'd had any political belief it would have been slightly to the left. But I'm sure he was never one of those who flirted with communism.

(Interview, Saint John, December 12, 1983.)

27 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Molly Lamb Bobak (Fredericton, December 11, 1983), Norman Cody (Fredericton, December 11, 1983), Kay Smith (December 12, 1983), Joan Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983), Carl Schaefer (Toronto, March 28, 1984), Charles Goldhamer (Toronto, April 2, 1984), Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984), and Aba Bayefsky (June 15, 1985).



28 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (May 12, 1944). Coll.: PANB.

29 Miller Brittain to his parents (June 17, 1945). Coll.: CWM.

30 With the notable exception of small coal-mining towns, the C.C.F. had made little progress in the Maritimes.

31 The Communist Party of Canada now advocated a united "National Front," perhaps led by the labour movement, to combat international fascism:

Despite the profound differences between the Communist Party and the leadership of the C.C.F. on questions of socialist philosophy and the strategy and tactics of the class struggle, a united front of our organizations in the effort to destroy Hitlerism is possible. It is not only possible, but vitally necessary. The fundamental interests of the Canadian working-class movement and the Canadian people demand that such a united front be formed now. We urge the broadest unity throughout the country, of C.C.F. and Communist Party organizations, and all allied forces, around our common aim to defeat Hitler and destroy the menace of fascism.

(Excerpted from the Communist Party of Canada's brochure A National Front for Victory, p.16; quoted in Tim Buck, Thirty Years, 1922-1952: The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada (Toronto: Progress Books, 1952).)

32 This was first pointed out by Hugh Halliday in "Miller Brittain: War Artist," Canadian Aviation Historical Society Journal, 16, 1 (Spring 1978), p.26.

33 Miller Brittain to his parents (July 28, 1945). Coll.: CWM. The impatience with British social stratification arose in conjunction with Brittain's expression of nationalistic pride. The twin themes reached a peak in a letter sent to his parents on January 2, 1944 (coll.: CWM):

I shall be glad to be home again when the show is over. This country [England] is wonderful in many ways but it is not my country. The future is in the New World and that is where I want to be. It is the quick tempo I long for - where improvements come quickly. I believe all our training

has made us impatient with all that stands still. That kind of impatience is needed in Saint John as well as here and you will find a noisy bunch of progressives coming home.

34 Miller Brittain to his parents (July 28, 1945). Coll.: CWM.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 2

1. Avery Shaw; "Looking Forward in Saint John," Canadian Art, 4, 4 (Summer 1947), pp.166-168:

...Brittain has turned out a series of fine drawings in pastel and conté on biblical themes, brilliant in drawing and colour, and of great psychological penetration.

Several writers have incorrectly dated the first of the Biblical pictures later than 1941. See, for example, Donald F.P. Andrus, Drawings and Pastels, c.1930-1967, by Miller Gore Brittain (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, Creative Art Centre, 1968), p.9: "The religious phase in its literal form seems to have begun with a particular drawing, the 1946 MARY MAGDALENE..."

2. Jean Sweet, for example, in a short essay written for possible use in Vancouver newspapers during a 1970 exhibition of Brittain's art, argues that the Biblical works should be seen as his "War pictures." Sweet supports this by recalling that when she suggested it to the artist, he replied, "How did you know?" She concludes from this exchange that Brittain used Biblical subject matter to exorcise the guilt experienced because of his R.C.A.F. activities during the War. (Sweet's text is in a private collection, Saint John.)

As will be argued in chapter 2 of this thesis, the Biblical works are, indeed, best seen as Brittain's "War pictures," but because they exemplify the spiritual development that he underwent during the War rather than because they acted as agents of confession and cauterization. Such an interpretation is supported by Andrus, op.cit., p.9:

...Carl Schaefer related how he had attempted for some considerable time and without success to secure Brittain's services as a war artist for the R.C.A.F. Brittain invariably replied that he had been trained to drop bombs as a bomb-aimer and that was what he intended to do until he was no longer needed for the job. In the meanwhile there was no question of his working at his art.

In the light of this evidence it would seem inaccurate [sic] to state as has been done on more than one occasion that the religious

phase that follows the War was some sort of reaction to or atonement for his war-time activities.

3 Miller Brittain, "My Aims as an Artist," unpublished text (n.d.), n.p. Coll.: CWM.

4 Miller Brittain, in: Kirk Jones, Painting a Province, National Film Board of Canada, 1963; and Kent Martin, Miller Brittain, National Film Board of Canada, 1981.

5 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (Hampton, N.B., December 10, 1983), Kay Smith (Saint John, December 12, 1983), and Joan Brittain Hamilton (Saint John, December 13, 1983).

6 Alex Mogelon, in Miller Brittain: In Focus (Toronto: Simon Dresdnere Publishers Inc., 1981), pp.66-67, confuses the Oxford Group with the Oxford Movement. The latter began in nineteenth-century England in an effort to Catholicize the Anglican Church. Its influence survives today in High Anglican or Anglo-Catholic denominations.

7 Walter Houston Clark, The Oxford Group: Its History and Significance (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), p.18.

8 Ibid., p.55.

9 Robert G. Stewart, Radiant Smiles in the Dirty Thirties: History and Ideology of the Oxford Group Movement in Canada, 1932-1936, Master of Divinity thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver (1974), pp.98-100,102.

10 The Oxford Group supplement in the Witness was discontinued in 1936, at which time the New Witness was formed, carrying only Group news until its collapse in December 1940.

11 Stewart, op.cit., p.107.

12 This information was given by Ted Campbell in an interview with Charles C. Hill, and appears in Hill's Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p.98.

13 Beverley Nichols, The Fool Hath Said (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1936).

14 Frank Buchman, quoted in Stewart, op.cit., p.124.

15 The essentially non-intellectual character of the Oxford Group was reflected in its maxims, which included such gems as "Woo, win, warn," "It's the banana that leaves the bunch that gets skinned," and "P-R-A-Y, powerful radiograms always yours."

- 16 Stewart, op.cit., p.107.
- 17 Mayor J.W. Brittain (Miller's cousin of Saint John, quoted in G.M. Fowler, "New Brunswick on the March," Witness, July 4, 1934, p.5.
- 18 Clark, op.cit., p.114.
- 19 According to the artist's sister Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (Interview: Hampton, N.B., December 10, 1983), Brittain first became interested in the Oxford Group because he played bridge regularly with certain socially prominent friends.
- 20 Interview with Kay Smith (Saint John, December 12, 1983).
- 21 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).
- 22 Stewart, op.cit., pp.71-72.
- 23 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).
- 24 H.P. Van Dusen, "Apostle to the Twentieth Century," Atlantic Monthly, 153 (July 1934), p.13.
- 25 H.P. Van Dusen, "The Oxford Group Movement: An Appraisal," Atlantic Monthly, 154 (August 1934), p.249.
- 26 Clark, op.cit., p.251.
- 27 Ibid., p.114.
- 28 Hill, op.cit., p.98; Stewart (op.cit.) does not indicate that Buchman spoke as part of the 1934 Maritimes tour of the Oxford Group.
- 29 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Kay Smith (December 12, 1983), and Joan Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983). Brittain could not have been enthusiastic about the stress laid on confessional meetings, at which he was expected to discuss his innermost thoughts with other members. In fact, according to Mogelon (op.cit., p.69), Brittain apparently refused to participate in confessional meetings, but was allowed to remain a member of the Group.
- 30 Clark, op.cit., p.225.
- 31 Alex Mogelon, "Memories of Miller," Montreal Art Magazine (March 1969), p.41.
- 32 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Charles Goldhamer (Toronto, April 2, 1984), and Aba Bayefsky (Toronto,

June 15, 1985). Carl Schaefer also provided this information, in a letter to the author (November 20, 1982).

33 During the latter half of the 1940's, as Brittain became involved almost exclusively with Biblical subject matter, his art came to resemble Blake's in certain formal respects. These similarities are only slight in Brittain's War Artist works, in which the Canadian government expected objective, reportorial accuracy. Specific Blakean imagery, especially the sunflower, persisted in Brittain's art well into the 1950's.

34 British museums are, of course, rich in Blake holdings; the Tate Gallery has a particularly fine collection. That Brittain "visited collections of Blake's work and found a kindred spirit in the poet, artist, [and] visionary" in London is specifically stated by Gretchen Pierce in "History Has Put Brittain's Art Into True Perspective," (Halifax) Mail-Star, May 10, 1976.

35 However, there is no record of Brittain having read either All Religions Are One or There Is No Natural Religion.

36 Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, eds., Blake's Poetry and Designs: Authoritative Texts, Illuminations in Color and Monochrome, Related Prose, Criticism (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p.13.

37 Ibid., p.29.

38 J. Russell Harper, "The Paintings of Miller Brittain," Miller Brittain - Painter (Sackville, N.B.: Mount Allison University, Owens Art Gallery, 1981); [p.6]. Harper is the only source to identify the camp specifically as Belsen. Janet Webster had married a French painter, Camille Roche, and was living in Europe when the Nazis seized power in Germany. (Interview with Erica Deichmann-Gregg (Fredericton, May 4, 1984).)

39 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (June 18, 1945). Coll.: PANB.

40 Miller Brittain to his parents (November 5, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

41 Miller Brittain, "My Aims as an Artist," op.cit., n.p.

42 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), and Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984). The same information was given by Carl Schaefer in "Miller Brittain: Portrait of a Mystic," Ideas, a CBC Radio broadcast (September 20, 1972), CBC Ag#59-01-0018.

43 The first of the songs, "Holy Thursday," takes place in London and is sung by an adult who can observe, but cannot or does not par-

participate in the activities of the charity children, here characterized as "multitudes of lambs." The second song, "Nurse's Song," takes place in a pastoral setting, but is again sung by an adult. The nurse, though, enters more completely into the world of her young charges, and offers no didactic-moralizing to them or to the reader. All the other poems abandon both the adult singer and the geographically precise contextualization of these two songs, since one of the charms of children's innocence resides in their inability to conceptualize the notions of personality or place.

44 In his lengthy poem "Vala, or The Four Zoas" (1797-1804), Blake named the condition of blindly idyllic bliss "Beulah." Beulah thus corresponds to the traditional Christian conception of Eden. However, Blake used the name "Eden" to refer not to a garden of perfect innocence, but to a realm in which innocence has been tempered by exposure to evil and hardship.

45 Blake's conception of the necessary co-existence of good and evil can perhaps be most forcefully demonstrated by comparing "companion" poems from the two sets of Songs. For example, "Introduction" from Songs of Innocence is purely Arcadian:

Piping down the valleys wild,  
Piping sons of pleasant glee,  
On a cloud I saw a child,  
And he laughing said to me;  
'Pipe a song about a Lamb!  
So I piped with merry cheer.  
'Piper, pipe that song again;  
So I piped: he wept to hear.  
'Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe,  
'Sing thy songs of happy cheer:  
So I sung the same again,  
While he wept with joy to hear.  
'Piper, sit thee down and write  
'In a book that all may read.'  
So he vanish'd from my sight,  
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,  
And I made a rural pen,  
And I stain'd the water clear,  
And I wrote my happy songs  
Every child may joy to hear.

Conversely, "Introduction" from Songs of Experience is the song of a chastened, but therefore a wiser, humanity:

Hear the voice of the Bard!  
Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;  
Whose ears have heard  
The holy Word  
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,  
 And weeping in the evening dew;  
 That might controll  
 The starry pole,  
 And fallen, fallen light renew!

'O Earth, O Earth, return.'  
 'Arise from out the dewy grass;  
 'Night is worn,  
 'And the morn /  
 'Rises from the slumberous mass.

'Turn away no more;  
 'Why wilt thou turn away?  
 'The starry floor,  
 'The wat'ry shore,  
 'Is giv'n thee till the break of day.'

46 By the time of Blake's later epic poems ("Vala, or The Four Zoas," 1797-1804; "Milton, A Poem in Two Books," 1804-08; and "Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion," 1804-20), his faith in the liberating power of the American and French Revolutions had died. Nevertheless, he maintained his belief in the necessity of an energy-filled catalyst to challenge the reign of pure Innocence. He turned inward, invoking the visionary Imagination into this role, very much as Britain was to do during the last decade of his own life. See Morton D. Paley, "Introduction," Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Songs of Innocence' and 'of Experience', ed. Morton D. Paley (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p.8.

47 Quoted in Sir Geoffrey Keynes, ed., The Complete Writings of William Blake (London, 1966), p.380. For further evidence of Blake's notion of the relationship between innocence and experience, see especially the three long poems written from 1789 to 1793: "Tiriell," "The Book of Thel," and "Visions of the Daughters of Albion."

48 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (April 27, 1945). Coll.: PANB.

49 Miller Brittain to his parents (October 18, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

50 In 1981, an unidentified columnist for the Fredericton Gleaner suggested another possible, though very poorly documented, relationship between Blake and Brittain in the latter's art of the 1950's ("Artist's Career Illustrated," August 29, 1981, p.21):

Man and Woman (1957), in the collection of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery incorporates the idea which is central to so much of the work of William Blake, one of Mr. Brittain's mentors, that man is created incomplete and that only through union with woman does he become a total being.



51 Interview with Kay Smith (December 12, 1983).

52 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), and Aba Bayefsky (June 15, 1985).

53 Interview with Aba Bayefsky (June 15, 1985).

54 These engravings were first published as Illustrations of the Book of Job, in Twenty-One Plates (London, 1826). They are perhaps Blake's single greatest opus in visual art.

55 The unease felt by religions in the face of this sense of unfairness on God's part is accurately seen as a major inducement for the evolution of the concept of immortality, a concept evidently not achieved at the time of the writing of the Book of Job. Eternal life guarantees everyone a chance to be blessed or damned in accordance with their degrees of holiness or sinfulness.

56 Elissa Barnard, "Brittain's Strength is Unique Vision, a Power of Evocation," (Halifax) Mail-Star, December 12, 1981.

57 J. Russell Harper, (op.cit., [p.8]) has argued that certain paintings from the 1950's (e.g., Quo Vadis, c.1955; mixed media on masonite, private collection) continue to probe the duality of good and evil.

58 L.S. Loomer met Brittain in the early 1950's. According to him (Three Painters: Boardman Robinson, Jack Humphrey, Miller Brittain (Windsor, N.S.: L.S. Loomer, 1973), pp.22-23):

...The Horse's Mouth had very much impressed Miller, and I suspect he identified more closely with its central figure, then and later, than most people realized.

Brittain identified himself with Gulley Jimson in a letter written to Robert Hubbard at the National Gallery of Canada on August 17, 1951 (coll.: NGC Archives, file #7.1 - Brittain):

I spent yesterday filling out 16 pages of forms all because a New York collector phoned me to send on a couple of pictures. At those times I remind myself of Gulley Jimson's remark, "I mustn't blow my brains out from the inside."

60 For a listing of the many quotations from Blake's writings used in The Horse's Mouth, see Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to His Novels (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp.165-173. The only Songs of Innocence poem from which an excerpt is used is "Infant Joy," while the only Songs of Experience poem from which excerpts are used

is "The Tyger." With reference to the Job-Blake-Cary-Brittain connection, it is of interest that Cary made specific reference in The Horse's Mouth to Blake's illustrations of the Book of Job. (Cary, The Horse's Mouth (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1944), p.58):

I [Jimson] took Blake's Job drawings out of somebody's bookshelf and peeped into them and shut them up again. Like a chap who's fallen down in the cellar steps and knocked his skull in and opened a window too quick, on something too big.

61 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (June 26, 1944). Coll.: PANB.

\* 62 Wright, op.cit., p.125. An excellent example of the novel's attitude toward the interrelationship of injustice and creative freedom is on p.211 (op.cit.). According to Jimson,

The angels must always be surprised when some man dives head-first into dirt, and then just by a twist of his imagination comes out again as clean as a comet with two wings bigger than the biggest in all heaven.

Like Blake (see footnote #37, above), Jimson believed that the creative imagination is instrumental in achieving spiritual wholeness. (Further, as is evident in the quotation above, creative imagination in The Horse's Mouth is associated with images of falling, and thus of the Biblical Fall, which Blake had employed as one example of the necessity of evil in the process of spiritual growth.) This intermingling of evil, the creative imagination, and spiritual wholeness in Blake and Cary was echoed by Brittain in "My Aims as an Artist" (op.cit., n.p.): "...If the artist feels despair and makes a picture of it, it means he has faced his despair and turned it into a work of art...."

63 This Spinoza-based viewpoint is embodied in The Horse's Mouth in the character of Plantie, whose very name echoes his passive, vegetal nature. Jimson contends that "anarchists who love God fall for Spinoza because he tells them that God doesn't love them." (p.84)

64 Cary, op.cit., pp.89-90.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 3

1 Alex Mogelon, in Miller Brittain: In Focus (Toronto: Simon Dresdnere Publishers Inc., 1981) states (p.55) that Brittain studied drawing and watercolour painting with Elizabeth Holt at the Saint John Art School. The source for this assertion is unknown, and Mogelon's specific mention of drawing and watercolour painting may thus be an assumption. It is known, for example, that Miss Holt taught oil painting to some of her junior class students. (Interview with Norman Cody (Fredericton, December 12, 1983).)

2 Catalogues published by Galerie Dresdnere, and subsequently other catalogues and miscellaneous references, contend that Brittain first went to the Saint John Art School when he was eleven years old. However, classes began at the School in October, and in October 1923 Brittain was ten, not eleven, years old. In later years he indicated that he enrolled in the School in 1921; see his 1946 "Who's Who in American Art" biographical questionnaire in the "Canadian Artist Documentation: Miller Brittain" file in the NGC Library. However, there is no record of him having taken classes in 1922-23 (NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 1, Saint John Art Club papers, Saint John Art Club, 1914-[c.1928], p.123), and the record books for 1921-22 are not in the collection of the NBM, and are therefore assumed by present-day personnel of the Saint John Art Club to have been lost or destroyed.

3 Brittain was one of forty junior students at the Art School in 1923-24 (NBM Archives, op.cit., p.123), one of forty-one students in 1924-25 (p.126), and one of sixteen students in both 1925-26 (n.p.) and 1926-27 (p.143). Records for class enrollment after the 1926-27 year could not be located. Brittain himself, in 1940 or 1941, stated, "I... continued at the Art School till I was through [high] school." (Pegi Nicol, "Miller Brittain," Maritime Art, 1 (April 1941), p.16), and his "Who's Who in American Art" questionnaire (op.cit.) gives his high school graduation date as 1930.

4 The Art School had been established by the Saint John Art Club in 1912. It was housed in the Market Building on Charlotte Street in central Saint John, and was rented on a yearly basis from the Saint John City Council. For details, see Escaping Humdrum, a brochure issued by the Art School in or about 1932 (NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 1, Saint John Art Club papers), and a letter from C. Flewelling, Art Club Curator, that discusses the 1925-26 School season (NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 3, Saint John Art Club papers, Scrapbook, 1914-1926, pp.208-209).

5 Alfred Pinsky, "Painting in New Brunswick After 1880," Arts in New Brunswick, ed. R.A. Tweedie, Fred Cogswell, W. Stewart MacNutt (Fredericton: New Brunswick Press, 1967), p.154.

6 Ibid., p.154.

7 Ibid., p.154.

8 Ibid., p.157.

9 Elizabeth Russell Holt (1859/60-1971) was a devoted painter and teacher who enjoyed a long and fruitful association with the Saint John Art Club and the Art School. She received her first training in Saint John with Miss Florence Lavers (a Mount Allison University student) and Fred Pickett (a student from the New York Art School). She subsequently spent two years studying art at Valparaiso University in Indiana. She served as Director of the Art School from the time of its inception (1912) to its closure in 1934. Although Holt taught both the junior and senior students, she came to be more closely associated with the junior class, with Alice E. Hagarty assuming responsibility for the senior class. (NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 1, Saint John Art Club papers, Saint John Art Club, 1914-[c.1928], p.259.) Other information about Miss Holt's career with the Club and the School is scattered throughout many separate files in the NBM Archives, and her close association with other members of the Saint John art world is thoroughly documented in reports, Minutes, and newspaper articles from these years.

10 Interviews with: Erica Deichmann-Gregg (Fredericton, May 4, 1984), and Jim Stackhouse (Saint John, June 18, 1985).

11 Mogelon, op.cit., p.33.

12 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (Hampton, N.B., December 10, 1983).

13 Escaping Humdrum (op.cit.), n.p. Not all students studied all the media listed; see footnote #1, above.

14 Interview with Norman Cody (December 11, 1983).

15 Ibid. However, an examination of School and newspaper reports from the years of Brittain's known attendance has failed to uncover any reference to him having participated in any of the tableaux.

16 Pinsky, op.cit., p.157.

17 Ibid., p.158.

18 The Saint John Art Club began collecting works of art, most of

them paintings, in 1911. The majority of these paintings are now stored at the New Brunswick Museum. The lamentable longtime lack of exhibition space and of clean, dry storage areas on Club premises resulted in the deterioration or loss of many of the works.

19 Luke Rombout (Curator, Owens Art Gallery) to Mrs. Deirdre Spencer of the Saint John Art Club (December 16, 1968). Coll.: NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 6, Saint John Art Club papers.

20 Interview with Norman Cody (December 11, 1983).

21 Patricia Starr, "Maritime Art and Miller Brittain" (unpublished Bachelor of Fine Arts essay, Mount Allison University, April 1965), p.25. Private coll., Ontario.

22 Anon., "Art School Display is of High Order; Many Admirers," Telegraph-Journal (June 1926). This article is glued onto p.194 of the Saint John Art Club Scrapbook, 1914-1926, NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 3, Saint John Art Club papers.

23 Donald F.P. Andrus, Drawings and Pastels, c.1930-1967, by Miller Gore Brittain (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, Creative Art Centre, 1968), p.7. After the end of World War II, the increasingly subjective character of Brittain's art necessitated the development of a more personal, frenetic draughtsmanship. See Andrus, pp.9-10.

24 The Saint John Art Club was incorporated in 1912, with its principal object being "the general advancement of fine arts and the promoting and facilitating of greater knowledge and love of art on the part of the public generally." (Charles Foss, Jack Humphrey, Dr. Hugh Farris, and Mrs. Russell Yuill, "A Brief Presented to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences Under the Chairmanship of the Honourable Vincent Massey," p.1. This unpublished paper was presented to the Commission by the Saint John Art Club. A copy is kept in the NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 6, Saint John Art Club papers).

25 Saint John Art Club membership lists for the years from 1932 to 1936, as well as those for the 1941-42 season, have been lost or destroyed. The yearly membership fee, due on the first day of October, was \$1.00. Brittain paid \$1.00 to the Club on the following dates: November 9, 1933; January 9, 1936; November 19, 1936; January 19, 1938; June 11, 1940; May 7, 1941; and March 12(?), 1942 (NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 4, Ledger, 1932-1941, pp.85,11,60,81; Cash Book, 1939-1943, pp.49,75,95. All, Saint John Art Club papers.) None of these payments are specifically identified as to purpose. Brittain's name appears for the final time on the 1946-47 membership list (Ledger, 1940-1952, n.p.).

26 Interviews with: Joan Brittain Hamilton (Saint John, December 13, 1983), and Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

27 NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 5, Saint John Art Club papers, Record Book, 1908-11, n.p.

28 The incomplete Minutes of the Saint John Art Club make it impossible to establish a definitive listing of Brittain's activities while a member of the Executive. Extant Minutes are kept in the NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 5, Saint John Art Club Papers, Record Book 1908-11.

29 Ibid., n.p. The first four of these exhibitions were approved at a meeting of the Executive Council on November 12, 1937. The last five were approved at a November 1, 1938 Executive Council meeting.

30 Norman and Della Cody, however, contend that Brittain was generally not outgoing. (Interview, December 11, 1983.)

31 Interview with Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984).

32 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), and Joan Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983).

33 Interviews with: Kay Smith (Saint John, December 12, 1983), and Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

34 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).

35 Interviews with: Joan Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983), and Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984).

36 Interview with Kay Smith (December 12, 1983).

37 Mogelon, op.cit., p.56.

38 Ted Campbell's large (48' x 24') studio at the harbourfront in Saint John was a favourite place for Saint John artists, musicians, writers, and patrons from 1934 to c.1957. Campbell held a farewell party there for Brittain when the latter left the city to serve in World War II. (Jean Sweet, "Ted Campbell's Studio," Atlantic Advocate, 59, 7 (March 1969), pp.30-31, 33-35.

39 Persons interviewed who had attended parties at Campbell's studio emphasized the music, conversation, and games that seem to have typified these get-togethers. (Interviews with: Norman and Della Cody, (December 11, 1983), and Kay Smith (December 12, 1983).)

40 Mogelon, op.cit., p.60.

41 Interview with Kay Smith (December 12, 1983). Brittain's friends and family tell many anecdotes about his actions during these years, several of which were published in Mogelon, op.cit.

42 Among Brittain's odd jobs during these years were the following: employee of the General Coal Co., working at the Port of Saint John as a checker at the dry dock, reading meters for New Brunswick Hydro, collecting bills, selling door-to-door, working in the stores of a construction company, inspecting pile-driving, timekeeping on a construction site, painting highway lines, working at various office jobs, handling a betting machine at a race track, and serving as a returning officer in an election. Sources: interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Joan Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983), and Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984); Nicol, op.cit., p.16; Kent Martin, Miller Brittain, National Film Board of Canada, 1981; Saint John City Directory, 1936; and Mogelon, op.cit.

43 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).

44 Charles C. Hill, in Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p.98, claims that Brittain rented his studio in the autumn of 1938. The source for such a specific date is not identified. The studio address first appeared in the 1939 Saint John City Directory.

45 Miller Brittain, quoted in Nicol, op.cit., p.16.

46 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983). According to Brittain (quoted in Nicol, op.cit., p.16), his two years at the Art Students League were interrupted at one point by a five-month visit to Saint John. Although no reason for the visit is given, it was probably to earn more money to enable him to continue his studies in New York. During these five months he worked in the stores of a construction company on the West Saint John docks.

47 Mogelon, op.cit., p.56.

48 Interviews with: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), and Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

49 Miller Brittain, quoted in Mogelon, op.cit., p.58.

50 Ibid., p.58.

51 Marchal Landgren, Years of Art: The Story of the Art Students League of N.Y. (New York: R. McBride & Co., 1940).

52 Mogelon, op.cit., p.58.

53 Art Students League, unpublished typewritten attestation.

of Brittain's courses at the League (September 7, 1939). Coll.: CWM.

54 Harry Herman Wickey (1892-1968) was an American etcher, lithographer, sculptor, and teacher who, since his death, has been almost completely forgotten. He published his autobiography, Thus Far: The Growth of an American Artist (New York: American Artists Group, Inc.) in 1941.

55 Miller Brittain, quoted by Robert Fulford, "Surprise from Saint John," Mayfair Magazine, 31, 6 (June 1957), p.58.

56 The letter concludes, "It would be good to see you or have word from you," and is signed, simply, "Harry." Private coll., Saint John.

57 Wickey makes several references in his autobiography (op. cit.) to his teaching, most of them favourable: pp.11,28,30-31,47,51,68,74,75,76-77,79,102.

58 When Thus Far was published, Brittain wrote,

Harry Wickey's autobiography "Thus Far" has been published and it comes at a time when my beliefs needed strengthening....It is beyond all my hopes.

(Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann; letter postmarked December 10, 1941. Coll.: PANB.)

59 Wickey, op.cit., pp.12,23.

60 Ibid., p.107.

61 Ibid., p.79.

62 Ibid., p.104.

63 Wickey (ibid.) refers to his interest in quotidian human interest subject matter on pp.23,24,29,30,32,33,34,35,37,45,50,51,64,68,96,100,104,105,106.

64 Ibid., p.46.

65 Ibid., p.21.

66 Ibid., p.24.

67 Miller Brittain, "My Aims as an Artist," unpublished text (n.d.), n.p. Coll.: CWM.

68 This realist tradition has only recently begun to receive institutional attention. For a short summary of activity in this area, see, for example, Piri Halasz, "Figuration in the '40s: The Other Expression," Art in America, 70, 11 (December 1982), pp.110-119,145,147.



69. During these years the oppressively stark realism of Theodore Dreiser and his imitators was being overtaken in popularity by the less tendentious novels of such writers as Sinclair Lewis.

70. Wickey wrote in his autobiography (op.cit., pp.39,47) that one of the most important motivations for his own move to New York had been the seeing of works by John Sloan, George Bellows, William Glackens, Robert Henri, and Boardman Robinson. "What Bellows and Henri had to say about life and art, for it was one and the same thing for them, was along the lines I believed..." This attitude, combined with these artists' use of quotidian urban subject matter, would have made them particularly attractive to Wickey.

71. A further connection can be hypothesized between the art of George Luks and that of Miller Brittain: Luks' several Sidewalk Madonna paintings may have been the starting points for Brittain's 1940 painting of the same name.

72. Du Bois' satirical depictions of the well-to-do ultimately derived more from the tradition of Daumier, Constantin Guys, Jean-Louis Forain, and Guillaume Gavarni than from the American realist tradition. He spent several years in France, and returned to New York in 1930, the year that Brittain arrived there to study at the Art Students League.

73. One could draw a number of interesting parallels between the work of Sloan and Brittain, although many of the similarities in their art also appear in the work of a number of other artists. In 1928, two years before Brittain arrived in New York, Sloan had begun writing what would eventually be published as The Gist of Art (1939). Many aspects of Brittain's work are strongly reminiscent of remarks made in that book.

74. Milton W. Brown, American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.18.

75. Interview with Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

76. Kenneth Hayes Miller, generally known as "Hayes," was born in the Oneida Community (Oneida, N.Y.) in 1876. His family moved to New York City in 1888, and there he studied at the Art Students League and the New York School of Art. More important as an instructor than as an artist, he taught drawing and painting at the New York School of Art from 1899 to 1911, and conducted a class at the Art Students League beginning in 1911. Although largely forgotten today, he was the subject of books and articles in his own time, including a rapturous

biography by Lloyd Goodrich: Kenneth Hayes Miller (New York: Arts Publishing Corp., 1930). His most frequently reproduced works are his paintings of female shoppers, produced during the 1930's. Miller died in 1952.

77 Harry Wickèy's two references to Miller in his autobiography (op.cit.) are on pp.102 and 122:

I had been in Cornwall [N.Y., in 1935] only a few days when Kenneth Hayes Miller came to see me, and was very enthusiastic about my summer's work. I had always held Kenneth Miller in deep regard, both as man and artist....

...I am extremely grateful to artists like Delacroix, Constable, John Sloan and Kenneth Hayes Miller for their straight shooting and unsentimentalized reports of the scientific laws that govern their profession.

78 Lincoln Rothschild, To Keep Art Alive: The Effort of Kenneth Hayes Miller, American Painter (1876-1952) (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1974).

79 Kenneth Hayes Miller's popularity as a teacher, particularly during the first half of his career, is well-documented. For a reminiscence by one of his students, see Reginald Marsh's brief essay in A Memorial Exhibition: Kenneth Hayes Miller, an exhibition sponsored by the Art Students League and held in New York (September 23-October 11, 1953), n.p.

80 These artists included Edward Laning, Isabel Bishop, Reginald Marsh, Morris Kantor, and Raphael and Moses Soyer.

81 Brown, op.cit., p.182.

82 Despite his reliance upon Fourteenth Street subjects, Kenneth Hayes Miller seems to have been so interested in the art of the Venetian Renaissance that his paintings emphasize aesthetic rather than social concerns. At best, his art is typified by the sense of the potential for the picturesque in his figures. This sensibility is also present in the figures of peasants painted by Jean-François Millet.

83 These artists were not exactly contemporaries of Britain, all of them being ten to fourteen years older than he was. Those of them who studied at the Art Students League did so during the 1920's.

84 Brown, op.cit., p.183.

85 Kenneth Hayes Miller, quoted in Art Student League News, 5, 2 (March 1952), n.p.

86 Ibid., n.p.

87 Andrus (op.cit., p.7), although he does not state that these artists did have an influence on Brittain, implies as much in his summary of the New York art world in c.1930-32:

Brittain was studying in New York during the first years of the Depression and the contemporary painters whose art was in the ascendant at this time, people like William Gropper, Adolf Dehn and Peggy Bacon, all firmly based their art upon some form of political caricature or satire. In addition the internationally famed spokesman of this art form, the German artist George Grosz arrived in the United States in 1932. His work was already well-known and appreciated by those who were interested in what he had to say about contemporary society and his style of expression.

88 Other cartoonists working in this mode included R.K. Chamberlain, Bruce A. Russell, Fred Ellis, Clive Weed, and Edmund Duffy.

89 The creation of a convincing sense of underlying form was basic to the teachings and art of Harry Wickey, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and Henry Moore, whose work Brittain was to admire greatly in England (see chapter 5).

90 Higgins' name does not appear in any of Brittain's letters located by the author, but this does not argue strongly against the possibility of Brittain having known and admired the elder artist's work. None of the letters consulted in research for this study pre-date the latter years of the 1930's, by which time Brittain had been away from the Art Students League for several years. Besides, Brittain's letters rarely discuss other artists; even Wickey's name is a rarity in the Canadian's located correspondence.

91 Brown, op.cit., p.30.

92 Chemical analyses of Brittain's paintings owned by the National Gallery of Canada and by the Canadian War Museum, for example, have never been done by those institutions. However, prior to the circulation of the exhibition Miller Brittain - Painter by the Owens Art Gallery in 1981-82, conservator Adèle Trussler conducted scientific examinations of the materials, techniques, and condition of the works included in that show. A brief summary of her findings (Trussler,

"Observations of a Conservator") was published in Arts Atlantic, 4, 1 (Spring 1982), pp.26-27.

Media notations in exhibition catalogues, and sometimes even in museum and gallery files, must be used cautiously. Mogelon, for example, incorrectly identifies many mixed media paintings as "oil on masonite" (op.cit., pp.211-214).

93 Among the other important centres for experimentation with mixed media and Old Master techniques was the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, where a research programme was organized under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project.

94 Read's highly successful book was reprinted in 1945. It traced the active role played by art vis-a-vis society throughout history.

95 George Holt, "The Contemporary Interest in Methods and Materials of Painting," The Kingston Conference: Proceedings, ed. André Biéler and Elizabeth Harrison (Kingston: Queen's University Press, 1941), p.121.

96 Kenneth Hayes Miller began doing serious experimentation with media during the 1920's, and during the 1930's a number of artists became intrigued with the subject. John Sloan, for example, was particularly interested in Trecento and Quattrocento techniques (Landgren, op.cit.).

97 On a more practical level, mixing oil glazes with tempera had the advantage of being less expensive than using pure oil paint.

98 The following addresses and demonstrations were given on methods and materials at the Kingston Conference: George Holt, "The Contemporary Interest In Methods and Materials of Painting"; Ruthenfort J. Gettens, "Supports for Paintings"; Frank W. Sterner, "Preparation of Size"; Sterner, "Grounds for Painting"; Gettens, "The Important and Reliable Pigments"; Holt, "Egg Tempera Painting"; Holt, "Mixed Techniques"; Gettens, "Resins and Varnishes"; Gettens, "Volatile Solvents and Thinners"; and Stern, "The Recommended Commercial Standard for Artists' Oil Paints." (Biéler and Harrison, eds., op.cit., pp.119-165.

99 1938 was the year named by Brittain as the date of his first use of mixed media (quoted in Nicol, op.cit., p.17). That year, an article in the Saint John Citizen ("Local Artist Wins Front Page Space in Saturday Night; Miller Brittain's [sic] Picture Reproduced in Toronto Weekly," (August 15, 1938)) described the artist's media in some detail:

He is using [a] 15th century method of handling oil paints which has the advan-

tages of producing an appearance of luminosity and is also very permanent.

He uses masonite or birch-plywood which is given six or seven coats of sizing, followed by the drawing which is then varnished. This is followed by various coats of color and glaze which produces a rich luminous effect. He has done a number of successful portraits by this method and also some of his satiric group drawings.

100 Interview with Jim Stackhouse (June 15, 1985).

101 Max Doerner, The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting, with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters, trans. Eugen Neuhaus (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1934). For information on the "Van Eyck technique," see in particular pp. 329-337.

102 Rothschild, op.cit., p.96.

103 Miller Brittain to his parents (February 9, 1945). Coll. CWM.

104 Doerner, op.cit., p.vi.

105 See footnote #95, above.

106 Wickey, op.cit., p.120: "Form in its true sense projects a sense of substance and is never a perfectly realized contour covering a vacuum."

107 As Brittain's draughtsmanship became increasingly personal and expressionistic from the mid-1940's onward, the sense of three-dimensional solidity in his forms diminished.

108 Brittain was quoted by Nicol (op.cit., p.17) as saying:

When in 1938 I began to paint seriously, I sought an approach that would enable me to give full expression to plastic surfaces, and finally found it in an egg-tempera medium combined with oil and varnish glazes in various ways. With life pulsing around me, I have no desire to reduce it to a flat pattern of colour, but rather do I wish to convey a full sense of the human scene as I see it played, all the rich varied fulness of it and the people who make it up.

109 André Biéler advocated the use of mixed media by painters of the human figure for the weight and emphasis that it gave the figure through modelling. (Biéler, "The Indirect Method or Mixed Technique of Painting," Maritime Art, 3, 3 (1943), pp.82-84.)

110 Hill, op.cit., p.98.

111 See also Fred Hazel, "Miller Brittain's Art: 'I Start With an Abstract...'; He's a Maritime Painter Who Changes Color and Form Until It Looks Just Right." Weekend Magazine, 15, 10 (March 6, 1965), pp.44-45. Hazel quotes Brittain as saying that he used egg tempera "because I wanted something that would let me use my drawing...." According to Doerner (op.cit., pp.330,332), "The water medium [tempera] permitted of a very precise treatment of the drawing. No other medium, in fact, allows of such a clear stroke if set into a thin oil or varnish glaze."

112 Wickey, op.cit., p.86. The other two books were Paradise Lost and Don Quixote.

113 Ibid., pp.85-86.

114 Miller Brittain, "My Aims as an Artist," (op.cit.), n.p.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 4

1 Brittain received a total of three major mural commissions during his lifetime. The third, executed in 1953, was for a 5' x 22' egg tempera on masonite mural in the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Saint John. Both this and the two murals painted for the Lady Beavertown Gymnasium at the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton) in 1941 are extant and in situ.

2 Brittain painted two 34" x 37" mixed media on masonite murals for the Gymnasium, showing the women's basketball team and the boxing team in action. Almost all the available documentation on the commission is contained in a series of letters written by Brittain and Dr. N.A.M. Mackenzie (President, University of New Brunswick) to one another from January to June 1941. The letters are all in the Harriet Irving Library Archives, University of New Brunswick, "President's Papers, 1941 B" file.

3 Dr. R.J. Collins and his wife were noted patrons of the arts in New Brunswick. The information that Dr. Collins was the specific individual to commission the murals is conveyed in a letter to the author from Barry Lord (January 30, 1985). As Medical Director of the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital, Collins would have been the logical choice to announce what was probably a Hospital Board decision.

4 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (January 17, 1939). COLL.: PANB.

5 Work on the cartoons began no earlier than the spring of that year. According to an article published by Pegi Nicol in April 1941 ("Miller Brittain," Maritime Art, 1, 4, p.18), "Miller Brittain is doing some panels for the new Gym at U.N.B. ... When the panels are finished Brittain is to launch a mural for the tuberculosis hospital in Saint John."

6 Frances Mackellar (Assistant Secretary, Board of Commissioners, Saint John Regional Hospital) to the author (February 8, 1985). This information is recorded in the Board Minutes of the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital, which are now stored at the Saint John Regional Hospital. Oddly, this is the only recorded mention of the mural project that Mackellar was able to find in the Minutes. At the meeting in question it was proposed that the suggestion be discussed at the next meeting, but no subsequent references to it were located.

7 "Art in Action" was held in the Normal School (now the Justice Building) in Saint John. It was organized in conjunction with government projects for training youth, and focussed specifically on art and crafts. Other artists demonstrating their work at the event included Kathleen Shackleton, Jack Humphrey (both, portrait painting), and Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (pottery). (Interview with Della Cody (Fredericton, December 11, 1983).) Brittain did most of the enlarging at the Hospital at night, using lantern slides of his designs, projected onto the walls. (Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (undated). Coll.: PANB.)

8 Dr. Collins was the specific individual to inform Brittain that the commission had been cancelled. (Barry Lord to the author, January 30, 1985.) Just as Collins had been the logical choice, in his capacity as Medical Director of the Hospital, to inform the artist of the awarding of the commission, so he was the inevitable choice to convey the cancellation decision. This is further emphasized by the fact that, according to an anonymous informant (interview: New Brunswick, 1982) Brittain expressed bitterness against Dr. Collins in particular, after the mural commission was cancelled.

9 See footnote #8, above.

10 Coll.: NGC Library, "Canadian Artist Documentation: Miller Brittain" file. The form is signed, and dated 1946.

11 See, for example, Donald F.P. Andrus, Drawings and Pastels, c. 1930-1967, by Miller Gore Brittain (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, Creative Art Centre, 1968), p. 9.

12 Among those interviewed, the following strongly doubt or completely dismiss Brittain's military service as a factor in the abandoning of the mural project: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (Hampton, N.B., December 10, 1983), Joan Brittain Hamilton (Saint John, December 13, 1983), Erica Deichmann-Gregg (Fredericton, May 4, 1984), and Jim Stackhouse (Saint John, June 18, 1985).

13 The cartoons were found by Sandra Paikowsky, Assistant to the Curator of the Art Department.

14 The most partisan of the published remarks on the reasons for the cancellation of the project are those of Barry Lord, who argues that Hospital authorities were hostile to the attitudes that he discerns in the mural cartoons. This viewpoint was first proposed in "Miller Brittain's Saint John Hospital Cartoons," artscanada, 24, 687 (June/July 1967), unpaginated insert. Lord renewed his argument in The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art (Toronto: NC Press, 1975), pp. 186-189.

15 All references to the cartoons in letters in the collection of



the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick predate the cancellation of the project. The letters in the collection of the Canadian War Museum contain a few remarks on the cartoons, but nothing of interest here.

16 Lord, The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art (op.cit.), pp.186-187.

17 Frances MacKellar to the author (February 8, 1985).

18 Brittain himself was told that he would be responsible for two corridors. (Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (January 17, 1939). Coll.: PANB.)

19 Interesting in its divergence from the actual thematic plan of the cartoons is a typewritten report of unclear provenance, probably written in December 1941 and now in a private collection in Saint John:

The first of the series depicts conditions leading to the contraction of TB, followed by the diagnosis, various forms of treatment, including operation, historical background of treatment and finally the cured patient leaving the hospital.

In fact, the cartoons deal more extensively with the conditions leading to contraction, view an operation as the only form of treatment (apart from changes in urban social and economic conditions; enforced bed rest is not considered), and are not at all concerned with the historical background of treatment.

20 This supposition is reinforced by the fact that the cartoon showing the cured patients walking toward the viewer includes the figure of Dr. Collins leading a young boy. (Lord, "Miller Brittain's Saint John Hospital Cartoons," op.cit., n.p.)

21 The cured patients include: the seated woman and leaning man from the party cartoons (now recognizable as the woman on the far right of the group and the man wearing a hat and tie); the two construction workers whose faces are clearly visible in the cartoon devoted to manual labour (now transformed into the two men on the left); the presumed mother and child from the cartoon set in crowded rooms (although the child is being led forward by Dr. Collins while the woman carries the same young girl who stands beside her in the reception room cartoon); and the running boy from the billiard hall cartoon (now seen on the left side of the group, immediately behind an anonymous woman).

22 This opinion is advanced by Lord in "Miller Brittain's Saint John Hospital Cartoons" (op.cit., n.p.). Andrus (op.cit., p.9) has

argued that the "flaws" discerned by Lord are attributable, at least in part, to Brittain's emphasis on expressive contour at the expense of naturalistic detail.

23 See, for instance, Longshoremen (1940; mixed media on masonite; National Gallery of Canada). Charles C. Hill describes that painting as being based on an assimilation of early German Renaissance compositional devices, such as the use of significant gestures and glances made by the figures. (Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p.98.)

24 Similar religious imagery appears in the cartoon showing the two construction workers. The two boards that they carry intersect in such a way that they create the image of a cross resting on the shoulder of one of the figures.

25 Interviews with: Molly Lamb Bobak (Fredericton, December 11, 1983), Kay Smith (Saint John, December 12, 1983), and Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984). Kay Smith indicates that she had the impression that Brittain found the didactic character of the cartoons "too cut and dried" for his taste.

26 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (postmarked December 10, 1941). Coll.: PANB.

27 DuMond was a member of, among other organizations, the Society of Mural Painters. The only reference in Harry Wickey's autobiography, Thus Far: The Growth of an American Artist (New York: American Artists Group, Inc., 1941), is a note on p.63 that, as a young man, he had helped his friend Arthur Covey stretch canvas for murals on which he (Covey) was working.

28 Lincoln Rothschild, To Keep Art Alive: The Effort of Kenneth Hayes Miller, American Painter (1876-1952) (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1974), p.44.

29 Ibid., pp.23,60.

30 Ibid., pp.26,57-65.

31 Interview with Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

32 The names of the 149 attendees of the Conference of Canadian Artists are given on pp.168-169 of André Biéler and Elizabeth Harrison, eds., The Kingston Conference: Proceedings (Kingston: Queen's University Press, 1941). Brittain was one of five New Brunswick artists to attend, the other four being Ted Campbell, Julia Crawford, Jack Humphrey, and Lucy Jarvis.

33 André Biéler, "Preface," Biéler and Harrison, op.cit., p.v.

34 Ibid., p.v.

35 Walter Abell, "Editorial," Maritime Art, 2 (October-November 1941), p.4.

36 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (undated). Coll.: PANB. Specific aspects of Edward Rowan's address at the Kingston Conference that probably impressed Brittain are noted in the main text, but one can also speculate about Rowan's personality and character traits that Brittain would have found attractive. Two such traits, both borne out in Rowan's speech, may well have been his courage in championing art that he believed to be good, and his stressing of artistic integrity:

So far we [in the Treasury Section] have not had a non-objective mural but we have had abstract murals. In one case there was an artist's work that was an abstraction, which meant that I had to work with that artist; I had to get him placed in one of the other buildings under the programme, and I had to see that the people in that community would accept his work. I was willing to try.

(Edward Rowan, "The American Renaissance," Bieler and Harrison, op.cit., p.87.)

A great many artists say, "Well, you have Carl [sic: Clark] Mills on your jury --" and we had; we thought he was going to be one of the best and he was one of the worst we ever had -- "you have [William] Zorach and these other painters. I am going to do some designs in this man's direction, or I am going to work towards that man on the jury." That is always a fatal mistake. The artist who is true to himself, in every thing he does, is the one who wins out in the end; and he wins out not once but many times. I have never seen it fail.

(Ibid., p.89.)

37 Interview with Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984). Mrs. Deichmann-Gregg was unable to assert without doubt that Brittain held that governments should sponsor murals in public buildings, but believes she recalls the artist stating words to that effect.

38 The Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture (1932-43) was

one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal art programmes, the best-known of which was the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project. The Treasury programme, later renamed the Treasury Section of Fine Arts (1938) and later still the Section of Fine Arts of the Public Buildings Administration of the Federal Works Agency, differed substantially from the W.P.A., and sponsored only half as many murals: 1116. The Section was administered by Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson, with Rowan as an operational deputy. When awarding commissions, Treasury Section officials tended to prefer American Scene-style murals, preferably executed in a manner neither abstract nor academic.

39 Rowan, op.cit., p.78. Rowan's belief that a mural renaissance could and should be effected in Canada was made clear in part of his address (p.87):

One per cent of the total cost of a building is to be reserved [in the Treasury Section plan] for such interior embellishment.... Personally I think it represents a sort of decent thrift, and it is a phrase I should like to leave with you to consider as a proposal which may be made some time to your federal government, to your provincial governments, to your municipalities, and particularly to your private architects. And when you are called in to serve on some committee in relation to some public or private building, for heaven's sake take the attitude that the building is not complete until it has some embellishment.

40 Rowan, op.cit., p.81. The populist stance of the Section of Fine Arts sprang of necessity from the fact that it was a government agency using tax money to commission large artworks in public places. Balancing the requirements and expectations of the patron, the artist, and the public was frequently difficult, and tended to preclude anything but folksy subject matter rendered in a realist style. For specific examples, see the National Division of the American National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C.; Record Group 121 ("Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Public Building Service"), compiled by W. Lane Van Neste and Virgil E. Baugh in 1958 (pp.28-41). This inventory was reprinted in Francis V. O'Connor's Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1969), pp.131-143.

41 Rowan, op.cit., p.89.

42 Miller Brittain, "My Aims as an Artist," unpublished text

(n.d.), n.p. Coll.: CWM.

43 Rowan, op.cit., p.92.

44 Ibid., p.93.

45 In addition to Rowan's address, discussions of the active role available for art in a democracy were led by Walter Abell, Albert Cloutier, Symeon Shimin, and Thomas Hart Benton. (Bieler and Harrison, op.cit., pp.22-72,96-97.)

46 Barry Lord, in a letter to the author (January 30, 1985), recalls that he tape-recorded an interview with Brittain for a Saint John radio station during the early 1960's, and that in the interview the artist expressed an admiration for Rivera. The radio station, by process of elimination, can be identified as CFBC. A telephone-conversation (May 31, 1985) with station officials revealed that, in accordance with standard operating and storage procedures, the tape was erased several years ago.

47 Interview with Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

48 Lord, "Miller Brittain's Saint John Hospital Cartoons," op.cit., n.p.

49 Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., Diego Rivera (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1931). This catalogue consists of a lengthy essay ("The Work of Diego Rivera"), two short texts ("Notes on the Style of Diego Rivera"; "Fresco Painting"), a chronology of the artist's life, a checklist of the exhibition, and many black and white reproductions. When the catalogue was printed, only three of the seven frescoes listed in it were actually in preparation: Agrarian Leader Zapata, Sugar Cane, and Liberation of the Peon. The exhibition was held from December 23, 1931 to January 27, 1932.

50 Diego Rivera and Bertram D. Wolfe, Portrait of America (New York: Covici-Friede, 1934).

51 Lincoln Kerstein, in Lincoln Kerstein and Julien Levy, Murals by American Painters and Photographers (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), pp.9-10.

52 These were Mexican Art Today (October 16-November 7, 1943) and Contemporary Mexican Painting and Furniture (October 18-November 17, 1946). The first was circulated by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the second by the National Gallery of Canada, although the Toronto showing included additions from the J.S. MacLean collection, Toronto. (Karen McKenzie and Larry Pfaff, "The Art Gallery of Ontario: Sixty Years of Exhibitions, 1906-1966," RACAR: Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review, 7, 1-2 (1980), pp.62-91.

53 Frances K. Smith, André Biéler: An Artist's Life and Times (Toronto: Merritt Publishing, 1980), pp.89-106.

54 Biéler lectured in Fredericton, Sackville, Charlottetown, Halifax, Wolfville, and Saint John between January 24 and February 4, at the behest of the National Gallery. (Ibid., p.98.) His lecture in Saint John was sponsored by the Maritime Art Association and the Saint John Art Club. It was summarized in a press release written by Jack Humphrey, a copy of which is in storage in the NBM Archives, Shelf 85, Box 1, Saint John Art Club papers:

In a few years when an expected new direction of Canadian Art is established and last summer's conference of Canadian Artists is recorded as an historical turning point, André Biéler will be remembered as the man most responsible for recognizing the timeliness of the trend and for extensively preparing and organizing the creative artists to meet it. Mr. Biéler's lecture, "Mexican and Canadian Art"...clearly showed how the new art of Mexico, with its concern for humanity and social values was in contrast to the landscape painting of Canada, contemporary with it...The Mexicans, intensely absorbed in social reform especially vital to that country, by no means dispensed with the abstract beauties of form. From the cubists they learned to compose solidly and completely and the turning back to the ancient Indian art of their country gave them the simple and massive character of their human actors...The Canadian Painters contemporary with the Mexican muralists had expressed an emotion - a perception of the poetic qualities of the northern landscape, its silence, its lonely waters and the rich pattern of the seasons. A large and vivid range of colors was employed in the sweeping canvases...In contrast, the Mexicans had found inspiration in the life and conflicts of their people. A relatively few and for the most part earthy colors sufficed to build these powerful translations of community life and social history into lasting formal composition.

55 The Minute books for this period in the history of the Saint John Art Club appear to have been lost.

56 See, for example, George Woodcock, "Nationalism and the Canadian Genius," artscanada, 36,4 (December 1979-January 1980), pp.2-10.

57 Woodcock, op.cit., p.4. Admittedly, this is but one definition of "nationalism," but it is singularly appropriate to Canadian thought of the period.

58 André Biéler, in Conference on Canadian-American Affairs Held at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, June 14-18, 1937: Proceedings, ed. R.G. Trotter, A.B. Corey, and W.W. McLaren. (Boston/New York/Montréal/London: Ginn and Company, 1937), p.134.

59 In the late 1920's and during the 1930's, Bethune had held several positions of importance. He had been employed at the New York State tuberculosis hospital at Ray Brook, at the Royal Victoria Hospital (Montréal), at the Herman Kiefer Hospital (Detroit) as temporary director of the thoracic surgery department, and at Sacré-Coeur Hospital as Thoracic Surgeon and Bronchoscopist. He was elected to the Council of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery. He published extensively and was responsible for designing many new operating instruments for tuberculosis. When he left for Madrid in 1936 Bethune was one of the highest-paid men in his profession. Sacré-Coeur Hospital, where he had eventually been promoted to Chief of Thoracic Surgery, was visited by doctors from around the world, and Bethune held the additional posts of Consulting Surgeon to the Dominion Department of Pensions and National Health, Consulting Surgeon to the Mount Sinai Sanatorium (Ste-Agathe, Québec), and Consulting Surgeon to the Grace Dart Home Hospital (Montréal). See Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon, The Scalpel, the Sword: The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952), pp.45-109.

60 Lord, "Miller Brittain's Saint John Hospital Cartoons," op.cit., n.p. How Dr. Collins originally became aware of Bethune's work, and whether he knew him personally, are unknown. An examination of records kept by the alumni associations of the University of Toronto and McGill University, the only two viable Canadian medical schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and located in two cities in which Bethune lived, failed to locate any record of Collins having studied at either institution. Searches of city directories for Toronto and Montréal for the early decades of this century are similarly inconclusive, "Collins" being a common name.

61 The precise nature of the operation is not clear. Bethune pioneered several new operating techniques for tuberculosis, and Brittain's cartoon provides insufficient detail to make specific identification possible.

62 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (postmarked December 10, 1941). Coll.: PANB.

63 Before Bethune was treated with pneumothorax compression in 1927 at the Trudeau Sanatorium at Saranac Lake, Michigan, he had expected to die in 1932 of tuberculosis. During the depressing months at the Sanatorium, he created a coloured drawing five feet high and running continuously for sixty feet along the interior walls of the cottage in which he lived. The mural design was entitled The T.B.'s Progress, A Drama in One Act and Nine Painful Scenes, and Bethune described its programme in detail in "The T.B.'s Progress," an article written for The Fluoroscope, 1, 7 (August 15, 1932), pp.1-10. The multi-panel nature of the design may have had some influence on Dr. Collins and/or Miller Brittain. Collins would have been familiar with The Fluoroscope for professional reasons.

The cottage containing Bethune's designs was torn down in 1931. The drawings were transferred to the Fluoroscopic Room of the Tuberculosis Unit, University Hospital, Ann Arbor.

64 Paraskeva Clark described her involvement with the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy in a letter to H.O. McCurry of the National Gallery (August 16, 1939). This, and Pegi Nicol MacLeod's involvement with the Committee, are noted in Charles C. Hill's Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p.95. Also of interest is the fact that MacLeod had herself painted a mural at the Fisher Vocational School in Woodstock, N.B. during the summer of 1941. (Joan Murray, Daffodils in Winter: The Life and Letters of Pegi Nicol MacLeod, 1904-1949 (Moonbeam, Ont.: Penumbra Press, 1984), pp.47-48.)

65 Quoted in Marjorie Freeman Campbell, Holbrook of the San (Toronto, 1953), p.57; and the Canadian Tuberculosis Association, Annual Report, 1955, p.102.

66 Katherine McCuaig, "From 'A Social Disease With a Medical Aspect' to 'A Medical Disease With a Social Aspect': Fighting the White Plague in Canada, 1900-1940," Norman Bethune: His Times and his Legacy/son époque et son message, ed. David A.E. Shephard and Andrée Lévesque, for the Bethune Foundation (Ottawa: Canadian Public Health Association, 1982), p.55.

67 By 1925, \$3,500,000 had been spent on accomodation, on laboratories, and on radiographic, surgical, and dental facilities. Another \$500,000 went for hospital equipment, and \$900,000 was spent in the new area of occupational therapy. See McCuaig, op.cit., p.55.

68 Quoted in Campbell, op.cit., p.57; and the Canadian Tuberculosis Association, op.cit., p.102.

69 Artificial pneumothorax had saved his own life in 1926-27. See footnote #63, above.

70 Norman Bethune, quoted in Allan and Gordon, op.cit., p.324.



71 As noted in footnote #63, above, Bethune's own tuberculosis mural designs had represented the tubercle bacillus itself, but in allegorical form.

72 Norman Bethune, quoted in Allan and Gordon, op.cit., pp.92-93.

73 Norman Bethune, "A Plea for Early Compression in Pulmonary Tuberculosis," Canadian Medical Association Journal, 27, 1 (July 1932), pp. 36-42.

74 The following informants have speculated that a shortage of funds was the most likely reason for the cancellation of the project: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Norman Cody (December 11, 1983), Della Cody (December 11, 1983), Pauline Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983), and Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984). The New Brunswick Museum Art Bulletin, 10, 2 (March-April 1966), p.2, also states that "the project was dropped due to lack of funds." A news release from the New Brunswick Museum (June 1, 1984, "Miller Brittain Acquisitions," coll.: NBM Archives, Miller Brittain file) agrees that "the mural was never completed due to lack of hospital funds and the fact that Miller Brittain was accepted into the R.C.A.F. in 1942." A similar notation is given by Andrus, op.cit., p.9.

75 Interview with Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983).

76 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (postmarked February 17, 1942). Coll.: PANB.

77 This view has been promoted principally by Barry Lord. Kent Martin's Miller Brittain (National Film Board of Canada, 1981) also speculates that the project was cancelled "perhaps because its [the mural design's] message was unacceptable."

78 For details on the differences between the original plan for the mural and Brittain's extant design, see footnote #19, above.

79 The following persons were interviewed and offered recollections on this topic: Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (December 10, 1983), Norman Cody (December 11, 1983), Della Cody (December 11, 1983), Kay Smith (December 12, 1983), Molly Lamb Bobak (December 11, 1983), Joan Brittain Hamilton (December 13, 1983), Erica Deichmann-Gregg (May 4, 1984), and Jim Stackhouse (June 18, 1985).

80 Of the informants listed in footnote #79, above, those who felt that Brittain had resented certain aspects of the mural project were Kay Smith, Della Cody, Molly Lamb Bobak, and Jim Stackhouse.

81 Lord, The History of Painting in Canada: Toward a People's Art (op.cit.), p.189.

82 J. Russell Harper forcefully stated this opinion in his essay "The Paintings of Miller Brittain," in Miller Brittain - Painter (Sackville, N.B.: Mount Allison University, Owens Art Gallery, 1981), [p.5]:

Miller looked forward eagerly to carrying it [the mural project] out as a paid commission; even if the money involved was very little; it was not to protest social wrongs as was the motivation of left-wing Mexican muralists of the time, but simply because he was eager to increase his own meagre income.

83 "The Battle of Rockefeller Centre" was fought in 1933. Nelson A. Rockefeller had commissioned Rivera to paint a mural for the RCA Building in New York. Rivera, predictably, included anti-capitalist references in the work. Rockefeller requested that one reference in particular, a head of Lenin, be painted out. Many prominent figures aligned themselves on either side of the issue, which thus generated a substantial amount of publicity throughout the United States. Despite assurances to the contrary, the entire mural was destroyed on February 9, 1934.

84 Bethune's clearest indictment of private medicine in favour of socialized health care was delivered in his speech at a 1936 panel discussion on private versus socialized medicine, organized by the Montreal Medical-Chirurgical Society. The text of this speech was subsequently published in a short collection of Bethune's writings: Bethune: The Wounds (Little Books of Hope) (Guelph: Alive Press Limited, n.d.), pp.3-8.

85 Norman Bethune, quoted in Allan and Gordon, op.cit., p.93.

86 Bethune had died three years earlier, in 1939. His political activities in Spain and China from 1936 to 1939 had ensured that he was known as an exponent of socialist and communist economic and political opinions.

87 The obviousness of this and other devices in the cartoons suggests a lack of interest on Brittain's part in working on what was essentially a didactic exercise. (See footnote #25, above.) This implication should be borne in mind in discussions attempting to establish a clear ideological interest in Brittain's art.

88 In 1945, three years after Brittain had abandoned the Tuberculosis Hospital project, Donald Buchanan attacked the trend among writers on Canadian art to approach their subject with socio-political assumptions ("What, No Art Critics?," Manitoba Arts Review, 4, 4 (Winter 1945), p.25). Although he did not mention specific examples

in his article, Buchanan's comments are applicable to the mural cartoons, as much for his remarks on left-wing ideology as on the necessity for artists to be socially responsive to their society:

In his lectures and articles...he [Walter Abell, whom Buchanan praises as one of the few critics to write intelligently about Canadian art] constantly stressed the need for a greater integration between the arts and the life of the community. Urging that artists themselves should become more socially aware, he cited chapter and verse from history to prove his points.

What he wrote was intelligent and not to be confused with those specious pleas for social significance, as advanced from time to time by the promoters of "cultural fronts". To talk glibly of possible parallels between left wing ideology and the creation of living art is to be moved more by emotion than by realism. Fact is most politically-minded artists continue to paint, quite genuinely, with the sensitivity of their finger tips rather than with the edges of their minds. Otherwise, they cease to be good artists.

An interesting parallel can be established with Montréal, a city similar to Saint John insofar as it lacked meeting places for artists during the 1930's, forcing them to work in isolation. The effects of this imposed isolation on the potentially political nature of the work of Montréal artists is made clear in a conversation between Marian Scott, Louis Muhlstock, and Charles C. Hill. (Hill, Muhlstock, Scott, Leo Kennedy, "They Could Split Rock...": Painting in Montreal in the 1930s, and the Children's Creative Art Centre - A Conversation Piece," in Shephard and Lévesque, op.cit., p.120:

SCOTT: Most of us felt that we couldn't use paintings for political purposes.

HILL: But, Louis, you often did drawings of the unemployed.

MUHLSTOCK: As an individual artist, I was interested in people, and I was able to reach out for the unemployed, who, for the dollar or two that we could afford to pay, were happy to sit for us. I was glad I had these people....

SCOTT: But that is certainly not what I meant by "using art" [for political purposes]. Louis' work came out of his

compassion and fellow feeling.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 5

1 For more detailed information on Brittain's induction into the R.C.A.F., see his service record in the National Personnel Records Centre, PAC. (A letter of permission from a family member is required to gain access to these records.) The artist's letters, written to his parents and friends, document his activities from 1943 through 1946. Particularly valuable collections of these letters are owned by the CWM, the PANB, and Joan Brittain Hamilton (Saint John).

2 Hugh Halliday, "Miller Brittain: War Artist," Canadian Aviation Society Journal, 16, 1 (Spring 1978), p.25.

3 Pilot Officer W.P. Sprenger, Officer in Charge of Recruiting, Moncton, to National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa (November 2, 1939). Coll.: Miller Brittain service record papers, National Personnel Records Centre, PAC.

4 National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa, to Miller Brittain (November 27, 1939). Ibid.

5 Ibid. All subsequent references to Brittain's military postings are based on his service record at the National Personnel Records Centre.

6 F.J. Hatch, Aerodrome of Democracy: Canada and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, 1939-1945 (Monograph Series #2) (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, Directorate of History, 1983), p.125. This extremely thorough study of the B.C.T.A.P. during World War II has been used throughout this chapter to interpret and/or verify many of Brittain's comments in his letters.

7 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (April 20, 1943). Coll.: PANB.

8 Specifically, Brittain was worried about his take-offs and landings: "One of my chief troubles is keeping her straight on the ground in take-offs and landings. I don't have any trouble in the air." (Miller Brittain to his parents (May 12, 1943). Coll.: PANB.)

9 Brittain need not have felt too badly about being washed out of pilot training. Of 100 graduates from another initial training school course, this one in Toronto, only eleven had become pilots. (Miller Brittain to his parents (undated). Coll.: CWM.) Of the 58,644

pilot trainees who entered elementary flying school from 1939 through 1945, 22.5% did not graduate for reasons other than sickness, injury, or death. (Hatch, op.cit., p.132.)

10 Brittain's use of the term "bombardier" was not correct. The proper R.C.A.F. name for the position for which he hoped to train was either "air bomber" or "bomb-aimer."

11 The training at No.5 Bombing and Gunnery School had required Brittain to drop a total of 72 bombs. (Miller Brittain to his parents (undated; [July 14-20,] 1943). Coll.: Joan Brittain Hamilton.)

12 The information that Brittain trained in Anson aircraft is from Halliday, op.cit., p.25. Information regarding his training activities at No.1 Air Observer School is from Hatch, op.cit., p.173.

13 Miller Brittain to his parents (May 19, 1943). Coll.: CWM.

14 Miller Brittain to his parents (February 29, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

15 Interview with Donald and Pauline Brittain Laidlaw (Hampton, N.B., December 10, 1983).

16 Miller Brittain to his parents (February 29, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

17 Miller Brittain to his parents (March 30, 1944.) Coll.: CWM. Halliday (op.cit., p.26) misidentifies Jack Whitney Fraser as Jack Whitney Fisher.

18 Paddy Raymond and his father, Ernest, wrote and published a book entitled Back to Humanity (London: Cassell, 1945). Although based in large part on Paddy's experiences in, and reactions to, World War II, it is of little value in illuminating the activities and personalities of Brittain and the other members of the aircrew.

19 Efforts to contact the other members of Brittain's crew using a forwarding service provided by the Department of Veterans' Affairs yielded no positive results. Mail cannot be forwarded unless identified by the intended recipient's service number, and the latter is considered confidential information. I was successful in finding Victor Reynolds' service number, but he is no longer resident at the last address recorded for him in the files of the Department.

20 If Brittain ever completed this group portrait, its whereabouts are unknown.

21 Alex Mogeion, in Miller Brittain: In Focus (Toronto: Simon Dresdnere Publishers Inc., 1981), p.31, incorrectly identifies the

Squadron base as being in the resort town of Brighton.

22 Hugh Halliday, Curator of War Art at the Canadian War Museum, compiled in 1985 an annotated list of Brittain's World War II sorties, based on the Operational Record Book of No.78 Squadron. The list is kept in the "Miller Brittain" correspondence and newspaper clippings file at the CWM.

23 Miller Brittain to his parents (August 31, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

24 In an interview with the author (Toronto, March 28, 1984), Carl Schaefer stated that Brittain's thirty-six missions constituted two tours of duty, but this is incorrect. The crew had originally been scheduled to fly thirty-two missions, but on February 1, 1945, at the time when the crewmembers flew their thirtieth mission, they were told that the new total would be thirty-six. (Miller Brittain to his parents (February 2, 1945). Coll.: CWM.)

25 In an anonymous article in the Hamilton Spectator ("Now Holding Show in Toronto: Vigorous Artist Trades Brushes for Bombsight During War Years," (April 24, 1957), p.61), Schaefer is quoted as saying:

He didn't envy me at all. He told me he could feel his art best among the people he flew with. You know, there's something in what he said. When I was overseas with the historical section I had a sense of not really participating, and I can remember going to Cornwall on a leave and trying to paint a quaint little fishing village: but nothing could come.

26 Miller Brittain to H.O. McCurry (November 5, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain.

27 H.O. McCurry to Miller Brittain (November 24, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain. All relevant correspondence by McCurry, Lloyd Breadner, and Vincent Massey is in this file.

28 Miller Brittain to H.O. McCurry (December 22, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain. Brittain's reaction to the proposal to remove him from combat duty recalls the comments of Thomas Hart Benton in a 1941 radio broadcast used to open the Conference of Canadian Artists in Kingston. Asked whether or not an artist should engage in combat duty during wartime, Benton replied:

The question of who should or should not is one which depends on the individual and the individual's temperament and capacities. An artist who is convinced that his country's

independence and the freedom of his country's people is to be had only at the price of winning the war, should act, it seems to me, like anyone else who is so convinced. He should do his utmost to help win that war.

(Thomas Hart Benton, "Radio Broadcast," The Kingston Conference: Proceedings, ed. André Biéler and Elizabeth Harrison (Kingston: Queen's University Press, 1941), p.2.)

29 Miller Brittain to his parents (October 18, 1944). Coll.: CWM. See also, Air Marshal Lloyd Breadner to H.O. McCurry (December 29, 1944): Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain.

30 Miller Brittain to his parents (April 5, 1945). Coll.: CWM.

31 Interview with Aba Bayefsky (Toronto, June 15, 1985).

32 Miller Brittain to his parents (September 18, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

33 Brittain wrote to his parents on October 1, 1944 (coll.: CWM) about this portrait of Victor Reynolds, "I can do that at least as well as I ever could and everyone thinks the likeness is very good."

34 Miller Brittain to his parents (November 23, 1944). Coll.: CWM.

35 Miller Brittain to his parents (November 15, 1944). Coll.: CWM. No portrait sketches of members of Brittain's aircrew have been located to date. Those that still exist are, for the most part, probably in the private collections of the sitters and/or their families. See also, Miller Brittain to his parents (November 19, 1944, and November 23, 1944). Both, coll.: CWM.

36 However, Brittain later referred to working with both pencil and brush at No.78 Squadron base. (Miller Brittain to H.O. McCurry (November 5, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain.) This is contradicted by the Hamilton Spectator (*op.cit.*), p.61. In the latter article, the anonymous author contends that the artist restricted himself to black and white sketches while on active duty as a bomb-aimer.

37 Interview with Carl Schaefer (March 28, 1984).

38 Miller Brittain to H.O. McCurry (December 22, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain.

39 H.O. McCurry to Miller Brittain (November 24, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain.



40 Miller Brittain to H.O. McCurry (December 22, 1944). Coll.: NGC Archives, file #5.42 - Brittain. Curiously, Brittain's and McCurry's attitudes in this matter parallel those of Edward Rowan, whom both had met at the Conference of Canadian Artists, and whom Brittain had particularly admired. In his lecture at the Conference, Rowan had argued:

...One of the proposals which a group such as this kind [i.e., the group attending the Conference] should make could be for some of your twenty-one year old artists and others to be enrolled as a regular part of the army, making these pictorial records. They could do the work very much better than the professional artist, invited to come in and paint a picture, because they would be a part of the general number, and their little drawings or their etchings -- whatever their medium happens to be -- will represent a record in a much more profound way than would be the case if a widely know [sic] painter should go in with canvas and brush.

(Rowan, "The American Renaissance," Bieler and Harrison, op.cit., p.82.)  
B.K. Sandwell, publisher of Saturday Night, expressed a similar opinion in his article "The Army Lives in Pictures," Canadian Home Journal (May 1944), p.72:

This time the soldiers are painting their own war. Last time you will remember, we engaged a flock of professional artists who were not soldiers, who never had been soldiers and knew nothing about discipline and esprit de corps, to paint it for us. The results were not, on the whole good....

41 The War Artists were required to requisition all necessary art supplies. It then took several weeks to process their orders and to obtain the desired equipment.

42 Miller Brittain to his parents (May 6, 1945). Coll.: CWM.

43 Miller Brittain to his parents (June 17, 1945). Coll.: CWM.

44 Miller Brittain to his parents (July 1, 1945). Coll.: CWM.

45 Each of the War Artists was asked to submit a list of pictures that he or she proposed to execute in Canada, along with an estimation of the length of time required for them. Brittain complied and, although he later considered the possibility of asking for a discharge after his return to Canada, he ultimately rejected that idea. (Miller Brittain to his parents (July 15, 1945). Coll.: CWM.)

46 Brittain had been eager to return to Canada since at least mid-1945, when a meeting between Vincent Massey and the War Artists was held at Canada House to discuss the artists' future plans. The predominant feeling expressed by the artists, "and in which I joined, was that we could work better in the atmosphere of our own studios and towns....The sooner the better as far as I am concerned." (Miller Brittain to his parents (June 3, 1945). Coll.: CWM.) He was scheduled to be repatriated in late July or early August 1945, but was in Ireland at the time, and so missed his opportunity. (Miller Brittain to his parents (August 10, 1945). Coll.: CWM.)

47 Brittain's predilection for daily genre scenes and their emotional and psychological overtones was contrary to official expectations that War Artists would strive to capture accurate detail related to War equipment and activities. He appears to have suffered little from what Royal Canadian Navy artist Donald Mackay described as the inhibiting effects of too much technical knowledge: "You thought more slowly instead of working spontaneously." (Mackay, quoted in Joan Murray, Canadian Artists of the Second World War (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Art Gallery, 1981), pp.9-10.)

A number of other War Artists also relied heavily on genre scenes, although few focussed on them as exclusively as Brittain. As Sir Kenneth Clark explained ("The Artist in Wartime," The Listener, 22 (October 26, 1939)), the reason art and society were reunited during wartime was that the artist turned to expressing a common emotion through the depiction of common experiences. For a similar viewpoint, see Douglas Le Pan, "The Arts in Great Britain in Wartime," Canadian Art, 1, 1 (October-November 1943), pp.13-16,36. An almost identical idea had been proposed by Thomas Hart Benton in his radio address used to open the Conference of Canadian Artists (Bieler and Harrison, op.cit., p.2):

When I graduated from the coal pile and became a draughtsman [in World War I], I was detailed to make drawings for record, of the aeroplanes, dirigibles, blimps and so forth, of all the things which were then the new mechanisms of war. I was thirty years old at this time and had been working as an artist since I was fifteen. [Brittain was thirty-two years old when he became a War Artist.] My habits and impulses were strongly set. Instead of making bare mechanical records, I made pictures in which the points of major interest were more likely to be human than mechanical. I was more likely to be interested in the ground man operating a blimp than in the blimp itself, which, although it was supposed to be the main reason for my drawing, fre-

quently became a secondary one. This was not deliberate on my part. When I became interested, I worked automatically under the drive of that interest, whatever it was. My habits of mind were set in a specialized way - I was a picture maker. Needless to say, my drawings were of no use for the records of the navy.

- 48 Interview with Charles Goldhamer (Toronto, April 2, 1984).
- 49 Miller Brittain to his parents (November 5, 1944). Coll.: CWM.
- 50 Miller Brittain to his parents (September 25, 1944). Coll.: CWM.
- 51 Miller Brittain to his parents (April 9, 1946). Reproduced in Mogelon, op.cit., pp.76-77.
- 52 Ian Vorres, "Weekend Art Chatter," Hamilton Spectator (May 1957). Vorres was reporting a conversation between Brittain and Kingsley Brown of the Spectator. (This article is incorrectly dated May 1967 in Andrus, op.cit., p.11.)
- 53 Miller Brittain to his parents (April 22, 1945). Coll.: CWM.
- 54 Halliday, op.cit., p.30.
- 55 Not until the death of his wife in 1958 did Brittain approach his art with clear intensity and immediacy of direct emotional involvement. (Andrus, op.cit., p.10.)
- 56 Miller Brittain to his parents (February 29, 1944). Coll.: CWM.
- 57 These were the only solo exhibitions of Moore's work held during the War; in addition, however, he was included in several group exhibitions. See David Sylvester, ed., Henry Moore: Volume One; Sculpture and Drawings, 1921-1948, 4th, completely revised edition (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Company Ltd., 1957), p.x1.
- 58 Ibid., pp.273-274.
- 59 Alan G. Wilkinson, The Drawings of Henry Moore (London: Tate Gallery Publications Department, 1977), pp.36,39.
- 60 Ibid., p.39.
- 61 Ibid., p.36.

62 Moore had earlier executed some drawings of bombed London streets, but they are remarkable chiefly for their evocation of desolation and tragedy in the ruin of inanimate objects than for any humanistic qualities in the order of those seen in the people-centred tube drawings. The much larger number of tube drawings attests to Moore's preference for subject matter that directly involved the human figure.

63 J. Russell Harper, "The Paintings of Miller Brittain," Miller Brittain - Painter (Sackville, N.B.: Mount Allison University, Owens Art Gallery, 1981), [p.10].

64 British Museum, Auden Poems/Moore Drawings, Section 3 (London: British Museum, 1974), n.p.

65 Wilkinson, op.cit., p.36.

66 See, for example, Wilkinson (ibid.), p.32.

67 The earliest located reference in Brittain's War letters to excessive drinking dates from December 30, 1944. (Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann: Coll.: PANB.)

68 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (June 26, 1944). Coll.: PANB. According to this letter, "Schaefer was not happy and got seven days leave for neurosis. On the same grounds I ought to rate a month."

69 Interview with Charles Goldhamer (April 2, 1984).

70 Miller Brittain to Kjeld and Erica Deichmann (April 27, 1945). Coll.: PANB.

71 Jennifer Brittain, in Kent Martin, Miller Brittain, National Film Board of Canada, 1981.

72 Of all the individuals interviewed for this thesis (see Bibliography), only Charles Goldhamer (interviewed April 2, 1984) felt that Brittain had suffered permanent and severe psychological damage as a result of the War.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER 6

1 Miller Brittain, "My Aims as an Artist," unpublished text (n.d.), n.p. Coll.: CWM.

2 This same idea is proposed by Robert Percival in "Miller Brittain 1912-1968," the introduction to Miller Brittain: Privately Collected Works, Nineteen Hundred and Seventy (Saint John: New Brunswick Museum, 1970), p.1:

The period he devoted to Religious subject matter, which apparently commenced almost immediately following his service with the R.C.A.F., was I imagine no more based on a deeply religious conviction than can be attributed to many painters of religion in the past.

3 Brittain married Connie Starr in 1951, at the age of thirty-nine years. She died less than seven years later, in 1958, leaving him with a young daughter. Very lonely and drinking heavily, Brittain sent his daughter to a boarding school while he lived on in increasingly dirty and disorganized conditions in his house at Sandy Point. Committed to the Provincial (mental) Hospital for a time, and defrauded of a \$78,000 inheritance from his wife by a young lawyer, he became lonelier and more eccentric. He died less than two months after his fifty-fifth birthday, on January 21, 1968.

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## Section III

## NON-PRINT MATERIALS

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APPENDIX I



## Appendix I

## SELECT CHRONOLOGY

- 1912 -January 12: Born at 206 Winslow Street, Saint John, the first child of James Firth and Margaret Bartlett Lord Brittain. (Brittain insisted in 1966-67 to Donald Andrus, then a curator at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, that he had been born in 1913.)
- 1921 -Birth of his sister Pauline.
- 1923 -October: Enrolls in the junior class of the Art School under Elizabeth Holt. The Art School was administered by the Saint John Art Club, and occupied the top (fourth) floor of the Market Building in central Saint John. Brittain later contended that he first entered the School in 1921 ("Who's Who in American Art" biographical questionnaire, 1946; coll.: NGC Library). Enrollment records for the School prior to the 1923-24 year are not extant.
- 1924 -Birth of his sister Joan.
- 1926 -June: Wins the first prize for charcoal cast work in the twelve-year-old class at the annual Art School student exhibition.
- c.1926: Most Brittain catalogues state that he attended art classes at the Saint John Vocational School in c.1926, but this is incorrect. (See all catalogues published by Galerie Dresdnere, Toronto; also, Donald Andrus, Drawings and Pastels, c.1930-1967, by Miller Gore Brittain (University of New Brunswick, Creative Art Centre, Fredericton, 1968), p.5)

- 1926-27 -Last year of Art School classes in which Brittain is known, based on documentary evidence, to have been a student (NBM Archives).
- 1929 -October: The Stock Market crash signals the beginning of the Great Depression. The economy of Saint John, which had been declining since the turn of the century, was yet further undermined by the collapse of more local industry.
- 1929-30 -According to Brittain, his final year at the Art School (Pegi Nicol, "Miller Brittain," Maritime Art, 1 (April 1941), p.16.
- 1930 -Graduates from Saint John High School.
- 1930-32 -Studies at the Art Students League in New York, under George Wright, Mahonri Young, William C. McNulty, Frank Vincent DuMond, and especially Harry Wickey, who became a lifelong friend and source of inspiration. Wickey successfully urged Brittain to abandon his original plan to become a commercial artist, and instead to concentrate on fine art. In New York, Brittain was exposed to the work of a number of urban scene artists, including Wickey, George Luks, John Sloan, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and others. Much of his own art of the 1930's was to be devoted to similar subjects.
- c.1935-42 -Appears to have been a member of the Saint John Art Club during this entire seven-year period, although Club records are incomplete and often confusing (NBM Archives). Elected to the Executive Council on December 7, 1936. Elected Second Vice-President for 1937-38, and Third Vice-President for 1938-39.

- 1936-37. -Exhibits two works in the 1936-37 Maritime Art Association travelling exhibition: George (n.d.; watercolour and/or pastel; \$10.00), and Portrait of a Girl (n.d.; watercolour and/or pastel; \$10.00).
- 1937 -April: Exhibits Little Theatre Rehearsal (1936; carbon pencil and eraser; New Brunswick Museum) and four other unidentified works in the Canadian Society of Graphic Art (travelling?) annual exhibition, Art Gallery of Toronto.
- May 18: A drawing of a Loyalist couple set against the backdrop of modern Saint John is reproduced on p.1 of the Saint John Telegraph-Journal.
- July 17: Little Theatre Rehearsal is reproduced in Saturday Night, on p.23, on the initiative of B.K. Sandwell, the editor of the magazine. "I shall always be grateful for that first bit of praise," Brittain wrote a few years later. "It meant so much to me because I had been working in the dark...." (Quoted in Pegi Nicol, op.cit., p.17.)
- 1937-38 -Teaches a night course in fine art at the Saint John Vocational School, and, at approximately the same time, teaches art at Black's Harbour, N.B.
- 1938 -Begins working in oil and tempera mixed media. First exhibits his mixed media paintings in September at the Saint John Exhibition: a self-portrait, and Sing-Song (1938; Art Gallery of Ontario).
- March 17-April 10: Exhibits Ware House (n.d.; pastel) in the 55th Annual Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal.
- August 6: D'Ye Ken John Peel? (n.d.; carbon pencil; private collection) is reproduced in Saturday Night, on

p.35.

-August 28-September 10: Exhibits three drawings at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto: Country Dance (1937; carbon pencil; New Brunswick Museum), Street Car (1938; charcoal; Art Gallery of Ontario), and D'Ye Ken John Peel?

-Moves into his first studio, at 108 Prince William Street. He relocated to a larger studio on the third floor of the same building in 1940, and remained there until entering the R.C.A.F. in 1942.

-Augments his income by teaching a small number of private students.

1938-39

-Exhibits Warehouse (n.d.; probably the same pastel shown in the AAM Spring Exhibition in 1938) in the Maritime Art Association 1938-39 travelling exhibition.

1939

-March 9-April 2: Exhibits Promenade (n.d.; \$125.00), Master McCullough (1930's; mixed media on masonite; private collection), and D'Ye Ken John Peel? in the 56th Annual Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal.

-April: Exhibits Longshoremen (n.d.; carbon pencil) and Head of a Girl (n.d.; charcoal) in the Canadian Society of Graphic Art (traveling?) annual exhibition.

-September: First, unsuccessful attempt to enlist in the R.C.A.F.

-September 18-October 31: Exhibits four drawings with the Canadian Society of Graphic Art in the Canadian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair: The Lecturer (n.d.), Little Theatre Rehearsal, D'Ye Ken John Peel?, and The Longshoremen.

-October 7: Dr. Fletcher Peacock (n.d.; mixed media on masonite) and Sing-Song reproduced in Saturday Night,

on pp.20 and 24.

-An "Exhibitions" listing appears for the first time in the Saint John City Directory, when the Exhibition Association opens at 288 Sydney Street. The Association survived until 1944.

1939-40

-Exhibits four works in the 1939-40 Maritime Art Association travelling exhibition: Portrait of Mrs. Hazen (n.d.; \$80.00), Longshoremen (n.d.; \$75.00), Boys Playing (n.d.; \$35.00), and Quick Lunch (n.d.; \$25.00).

1940

-April-June: Sends two paintings, Portrait of Miss Page (n.d.) and Longshoremen (n.d.) to the National Gallery of Canada, hoping for a sale. The Gallery's purchase budget had already been exhausted, and Parliament did not vote additional funds, and so Brittain's pictures were returned to him (NGC Archives, file #7.1 - Brittain). His relations with the National Gallery went progressively downhill from this point.

-November 22-December 15: Exhibits two paintings, Rummage Sale (1940; mixed media on masonite; private collection) and Night Riders (n.d.; mixed media on masonite?) at the Contemporary Arts Society's Art of Our Day in Canada exhibition, Art Association of Montreal.

1940-41

-Exhibits two works in the Maritime Art Association 1940-41 travelling exhibition: The Ghouls (n.d.; \$65.00) and Three Longshoremen (n.d.; \$30.00).

1941

-January-June: Executes two murals for the Lady Beaverbrook Gymnasium at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. The two works, one showing the University women's basketball team and the other the men's boxing team, were painted in Saint John in mixed media on ma-

onite.

- April: Pegi Nicol publishes an article entitled "Miller Brittain" in one of the first issues of Maritime Art (op.cit., pp.14-18).
- April: Exhibits twenty drawings and paintings in a four-man exhibition (with Adrien Hébert, J.W.G. Macdonald, and Bernard Middleton) in the Print Room of the Art Gallery of Toronto. (Brittain catalogues usually date this exhibition "c.1940-41": see all Galerie Dresdner catalogues, as well as Andrus, op.cit., p.5.)
- April ff.: Exhibits Portrait of Jack Humphrey (n.d.; chalk) in the Canadian Society of Graphic Art traveling annual exhibition.
- Exhibits in the Contemporary Art of the Western Hemisphere show sponsored by the International Business Machines Corporation and held in Toronto. He was one of two New Brunswick artists included; the other was Stanley Royle.
- June 26-29: Attends the Conference of Canadian Artists (the Kingston Conference) in Kingston and Ottawa. The Conference had two main themes: the role of the artist in a democratic society, and the value for the artist in familiarizing himself with traditional media and techniques.
- August-September: Exhibits at least one work at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto: Self-Portrait (n.d.; mixed media on masonite).
- September: Begins work on a series of mural cartoons for the Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital.
- November 28: Women's basketball team mural from the University of New Brunswick is reproduced in Saturday Night, on p.10.
- December 1-31: Exhibits two unidentified works in the Contemporary Arts Society exhibition at the Henry Mor-

gan and Company store, Montréal.

-Executes his first works using Biblical subject matter. He continued to produce them on a regular basis until 1949, and on occasion thereafter; but most date from the latter half of the 1940's.

1941-42

-Exhibits Entanglement (n.d.) and Excursion (1937; mixed media on masonite; private collection) in the 1941-42 Maritime Art Association travelling exhibition.

1942

-February 28: The Longshoremen (n.d.; carbon pencil) is reproduced in Saturday Night, on p.9.

-April ff.: Exhibits Salvage (c.1941; pencil and tempera white; \$30.00; private collection) in the Canadian Society of Graphic Art travelling annual exhibition, and wins the Society's Professional Jury Prize for that year.

-Spring: Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital mural commission is cancelled under unclear circumstances, after Brittain had produced eleven cartoons, all but one of them completely finished.

-July 8: Second, successful attempt to enlist in the R.C.A.F.

1943

-May: Makes two poor landings on his final instructor-accompanied training flights before his solo test flight to become a pilot, and is washed out of pilot training. Reports to No.5 Bombing and Gunnery School near Fingal, Ontario to train as a bomb-aimer.

-December 1: Arrives in the United Kingdom following the successful completion of his training as a bomb-aimer.

1944

-August 25: Brittain and his aircrew, now posted at

No.78 Squadron base in Brighton, Yorkshire, fly their first bombing mission.

- 1945
- February 23: Brittain flies his thirty-sixth and final bombing mission.
  - Spring: Appointed to his new position of War Artist, stationed in London.
  - September 4: Sails to Canada to take up his new posting at No.1 Composite Training School, Toronto, to continue his duties as a War Artist.
- 1946
- May 10-July 10: Exhibits five works in Exhibition of Canadian War Art at the National Gallery of Canada: Airmen in a Village Pub, Yorkshire (1946; mixed media on masonite), and Sam Wakes Us Up - 4 A.M. (1945; conté), Getting on the Transport (1945; conté), Posting the Ops List - Memories of 28 Squadron (1945; conté), and Home Again (1945/46; conté). All five are in the collection of the Canadian War Museum.
  - July: Brittain is demobilized, and returns to Saint John.
- 1946-47
- Rejoins the Saint John Art Club after an absence of approximately four years. His membership was never renewed thereafter.
- 1949
- First one-man exhibition: Dayton Museum, Dayton, Ohio.
- 1951
- Marries Connie Starr.
- 1952
- Birth of Jennifer Brittain, his only child.
- 1958
- Connie Starr Brittain dies of cancer.



1968

-January 21: Dies in the Saint John General Hospital.