'THE SENTINEL' AND THE EVOLUTION OF REBECCA WEST'S EARLY WRITING, 1910-1922

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This thesis aims to re-examine the first decade of Rebecca West's literary and journalistic career, based on an analysis of a newly discovered novel West began writing in 1909/1910. "The Sentinel", although incomplete and unrevised, is a key text to an understanding of West's early literary and feminist apprenticeship, helping to enrich reconsiderations of West's oeuvre in recent criticism. The recovery of West's writing into a female modernist canon provides a useful starting point, although the intertextual analysis of West's fiction and non-fiction during this period will show that this kind of categorisation is an inadequate representation of the complexity of her work. The limited time-frame of this study, 1910 to 1922, magnifies West's writing processes to reveal her self-conscious negotiations as a woman writer with the ferment of ideas and changes arising during the pre-war and war period, particularly in relation to contemporary feminism and an emergent male modernist aesthetic.

The first chapter is concerned with identifying, dating and examining the significance of "The Sentinel" as source material for West's later published fiction and non-fiction. Many of West's pervading interests are already evident in the novel, illustrating in retrospect how her writing was shaped by differing literary contacts, feminist affiliations, the war and personal experience. Chapters Two and Three consider the impact on West's journalism and fiction of her associations with the radical feminist journal, *The Freewoman,* and her introduction to avant-garde writers. West's unsuccessful attempt to rewrite "The Sentinel" as the novel, *Adela*, is discussed in relation to selected feminist articles and the short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony", illustrating her attempts to adapt her feminist interests to aesthetic ones. Chapter Four shows how the war provided a cutting edge and a point of definition in West's writing at this time, both in her consideration of the role of art and of the gendered structures of society. The influence of writers such as H.G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford and Henry James is discussed in relation to West's preoccupation with the role of women during the Great War. This material provides an important context for the analysis of *The Return of the Soldier* in Chapter Five. Chapter Six is a transitional one, describing the effect of the war and its aftermath on contemporary feminist ideology, and evaluating Rebecca West's attempt to position herself as a writer and a feminist in relation to these changes. Chapter Seven argues that *The Judge* (1922) offers a cumulative history of West's literary and feminist apprenticeship, at once completing the cycle begun with "The Sentinel" and initiating a different stage of writing for West during the twenties.

Acknowledgements

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Among the librarians who have helped me, I am especially grateful to Lori Curtis, Associate Curator of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, Tulsa University, for her always helpful responses to my queries and requests, and for her friendship.

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ABBREVIATIONS

S "The Sentinel". Unpublished Ms., Rebecca West Collection, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

A *Adela* in *Rebecca West: The Only Poet and Short Stories*. ed. Antonia Till. London: Virago, 1992.

IM "Indissoluble Matrimony". *Blast* I, 20 June 1914: 98-117. Rpt. in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West 1911-1917*. ed. Jane Marcus. London: Macmillan, 1982: 267-289.

RS *The Return of the Soldier*. (1918). London: Virago, 1980.

J *The Judge*. (1922). London: Virago, 1980.

YRB *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West 1911-1917*. ed. Jane Marcus. London: Macmillan, 1982.

BL *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. (1940,1941) Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.

HJ *Henry James*. London: Nisbet & Co. New York: Henry Holt, 1916.

AM Alison Macleod Private Collection of Letters (now held in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana).

Preface

The subject of this dissertation, the genesis and early development of Rebecca West as a journalist and novelist (her writing career spanned most of the twentieth century), has its own evolutionary story. Prompted by the paradigms set up by recent feminist criticism, in which forgotten or neglected women writers were "rediscovered" and presented for renewed appraisal within the context of a "female modernism", my original intention was to reconsider the early fiction and journalism of Rebecca West from 1911 to 1930. Considerable critical attention has been paid to this period of West's writing, which has been described as both feminist and modernist. My view of West's early writing and this time-frame in general changed significantly, however, following my discovery in June 1996 of an early, incomplete novel in the Rebecca West Collection held in the McFarlin Library, Tulsa University.[1] The novel, apparently written by 'Isabel Lancashire', a name which appears on the first page of two of the notebooks, had been catalogued under a misreading of this name - "Mabel Lancashire". Curiosity about the presence of the manuscript in the West collection and, on closer inspection, about the striking resemblance of the handwriting to that of the young Rebecca West, prompted me to begin reading the text. The ensuing story of Adela Furnival, schoolgirl, science mistress and, finally, suffragette, suggested the extraordinary possibility that this lengthy novel was West's first, composed before the posthumously published *Adela* fragment,[2] before her involvement as a journalist with *The Freewoman* from 1911-1913 and her adoption of the pen name, Rebecca West, and before her relationship with H.G. Wells, which began in 1913.

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[1]My research trip to Tulsa was made possible by the "Travel-to-Collection" grant awarded to me through *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. My thanks to this organisation. I am also most grateful to Lori Curtis, the Associate Curator of Special Collections, McFarlin Library, Tulsa University, for all her enthusiasm, encouragement and invaluable help in identifying and transcribing the manuscript of "The Sentinel".

[2]Antonia Till, ed. *Rebecca West: The Only Poet and Short Stories*, (London: Virago, 1992).

The novel's immediate importance was evident. It threw into question the dates attributed to some of West's earliest fiction attempts and, strongly autobiographical in content, it provided numerous key details which are missing from recent biographies and criticism. Its vivid depictions of suffragette experiences revealed, moreover, West's involvement and most immediate response to the militant feminist movement. Of equal importance was the novel's revelation of the depth of the young Rebecca's politicization and interest in aesthetics. Her belief in the close relationship between the literary and the political, with particular emphasis on the demands of feminism, is firmly developed, even at this early stage. This is illustrated in a striking analogy made within the novel, between the "woman's movement" and poetry:

> It [was] is a Movement characteristic of the twentieth century. As the poetry of [that] this age is divested of 'poetical devices and conceits,' is so [packed] loaded with thought and emotion that [forces no superfluities] superfluities are forced out; as the art of this age is so rich with the meaning of things that it is gaunt with a gauntness that puts the detail of fifty years ago to shame; so [was] is this Movement so heroic that the [short memorable phrases] the clash of brass bands, the floating [flying] bunting, the short memorable phrases spoken against the skyline, the traditional appanages of historical heroism had been crowded out (S, **p. 26**, Book 2, I, p. 52).[3]

By making "modern" poetry a metaphor for "modern" politics early on in the novel, West reveals aesthetic ideals she developed and maintained all her writing life. At the same time, this passage anticipates some of the difficulties of such an aesthetic. The tensions that emerge in "The Sentinel" between political and social commentary and differing novelistic conventions, contribute at once to its failure and to its importance as a key text in the making of the writer, Rebecca West.

Discovering this seminal novel refocused my attention on West's earliest writing processes and on the ideological conflicts that were later submerged within her authoritative

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[3]See my comments at the end of the preface about quotations from the novel.

journalistic voice. Its particular concerns also required a careful reconsideration of her early writing within the context of turn-of-the-century literature and history, the suffrage novel and the New Woman novel. As a source of West's earliest narrative voice and of some of the first influences which shaped her as a writer, the discovery of this novel reshaped my own assumptions, readings and approach to the young Rebecca West.

"The Sentinel" Typescript

The accompanying transcript of "The Sentinel" manuscript is a provisional one. I am currently preparing the typescript for publication, but this work has not yet been finalised. Quotations from the novel are followed by page references both to my provisional typescript (in bold type) and to the manuscript (West is not consistent in dividing up the novel, referring to particular sections as both "book" and "volume"). Where my discussion turns on a passage or word which is not clear in the manuscript (denoted by square brackets and a question mark), alternative possibilities are given in the footnotes. Deleted words or sentences are registered in the typescript in square brackets, and where these deletions have made words illegible, double brackets and a question mark are used.

Introduction

By force of habit I hunt for arguments (Rebecca West, 1913).

Rebecca West's prominence as a political thinker, outspoken feminist, respected novelist and journalist, has in recent years been revived and re-assessed, following a decline in her reputation which had begun even before she died in 1983. Triggered in part by the important collection of selected journalism by Jane Marcus,[1] the republication of her novels by Virago, two biographies,[2] and a variety of mainly feminist criticism, West's significance as a thinker and novelist has been reconsidered. The variety and diversity of West's literary career make her a fascinating but difficult subject for research. West herself anticipated this in a much-quoted comment from her most famous work, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. Confronted by a student wishing to write a thesis on her work, West writes:

> I was naturally appalled. I explained that I was a writer wholly unsuitable for her purpose: that the bulk of my writing was scattered through American and English periodicals; that I had never used my writing to make a continuous disclosure of my personality to others, but to discover for my own edification what I knew about various subjects which I found to be important to me; and that in consequence I had written a novel about London to find out why I loved it, a life of St. Augustine to find out why every phrase I read of his sounds in my ears like the sentence of my doom and the doom of my age, and a novel about rich people to find out why they seemed to me as dangerous as wild boars and pythons, and that consideration of these might severally play a part in theses on London or St. Augustine or the rich, but could not fuse to make a picture of a writer, since the interstices were too wide (BL, p. 1084).

Drawing on this declaration, a number of recent, mainly feminist critics, have tried to re-read her writing within a more specific historical context.[3] This re-reading process has inevitably

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[1]Jane Marcus, *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West: 1911-1917* (London: Macmillan, 1982). All references to this text are abbreviated to *YRB*.

[2]The first by Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West* (London: Macmillan, 1987) and more recently, Carl Rollyson's *Rebecca West: A Saga of the Century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).

[3]Bonnie Kime Scott and Jane Marcus are the two feminist critics who have contributed most to the re-introduction of West to scholars and readers, within a feminist and modernist context. In her anthology, *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990), and in her more recent assessment of women writers and modernism *Refiguring Modernism* Vols. 1 and 2, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) Kime Scott foregrounds West's importance as a literary critic and as a "female modernist". Jane Marcus, in her quite extensive discussions of West's writing, attempts to situate

been complicated by the diversity of West's writing, which ranges from occasional journalism to short stories, novels, psycho-biography, treason trial reportage and travel writing. The fact that most of her journalistic writing remains "scattered through American and English periodicals" contributes to the difficulty of creating a "whole" picture of West. She has insisted that there is no such "picture" to be found, and if there is a possible portrait, it is composed of fragmented themes rather than unifying theories. Critics themselves are divided about the best approach to her work: some have insisted that an analysis of all her writing over the full length of her career is essential, whilst others have studied selected periods. Carl Rollyson's most recent work, *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, is an example of the former approach, and Bonnie Kime Scott's *Refiguring Modernism* illustrates the latter.

While my own project participates in discussions of West's "modernist" and feminist writing, its focus is even more concentrated. Beginning with "The Sentinel", which may have been begun as early as 1909, and ending with *The Judge* (1922), allows me to offer detailed identification, description and analysis of the unfinished manuscript as the prologue to a re-examination of West's early fiction and journalism up to 1922. This date marks a watershed in West's writing career. I will argue that *The Judge* is in part a return to the unfinished and unacknowledged "Sentinel" manuscript, a rewriting and reassessment of a political and personal past. At the same time, *The Judge* foreshadows important changes in West's journalism and fiction during the twenties. The changes evident in her writing during

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her as an important feminist figure and provides a useful discussion of West's "authoritative voice". See for example: "Rebecca West: A Voice of Authority" in *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*, ed. Alice Kessler-Harris and William McBrien, (Westport: Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988) and Marcus's introductions to *The Judge* and *The Young Rebecca* edition. Margaret Stetz's work on West's writing is also important. See: "Rebecca West and the Visual Arts" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 8.1 (1989), "Drinking 'The Wine of Truth': Philosophical Change in West's *The Return of the Soldier*" *Arizona Quarterly*, 43.1 (1987) and "Rebecca West's Criticism: Alliance, Tradition, and Modernism". ed. Lisa Rado, *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*. (New York: Garland, 1995).

this decade both belong to and are separate from "The Sentinel"/ *Judge* sequence.[4] Within this early sequence, West's relatively small fictional output and already prolific journalism will be considered, in relation to each other as well as to broader generic and historical definitions. In this way, a portrait of the early development of West as a writer will emerge.

The first chapter is concerned with identifying, dating and examining the significance of "The Sentinel" as source material for West's later published fiction and non-fiction. Many of West's pervading interests are already evident in this novel, illustrating in retrospect how her writing was shaped by differing literary contacts, feminist affiliations, the war and personal experience. Chapters Two and Three consider the impact on West's journalism and fiction of her associations with the radical feminist journal, *The Freewoman* and her introduction to the literary experiments of the Imagistes and Vorticists. West's failed attempt to rewrite "The Sentinel" as the novel *Adela*, is discussed in relation to selected feminist articles and the short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony", showing West's attempts to adapt her feminist interests to new aesthetic ideas. Chapter Four discusses the influence of writers such as H.G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford and Henry James in relation to West's preoccupation in her journalism with the role of women in wartime. This material provides an important context for the analysis of *The Return of the Soldier* in Chapter Five. Chapter Six is a transitional one, describing the effect of the war and its aftermath on post-war feminist movements, and evaluating Rebecca West's attempt to position herself as a writer and a feminist in response to these changes. This chapter creates a useful historical context for the discussion in Chapter Seven. Here I argue that *The Judge* (1922) offers a cumulative history of West's

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[4]Due to the constraints of space, I have had to exclude an analysis of West's writing during the twenties. This chapter, for which most of the research is already completed, forms a natural extension of the existing thesis. My article, "Addressing Femininity in the Twenties: Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West on Money, Mirrors and Masquerade" (*Virginia Woolf and the Arts: Selected Papers from the Sixth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, eds., Diane F. Gillespie and Leslie K. Hankins, New York: Pace University Press, 1997, pp. 66-75), draws on this material.

literary and feminist apprenticeship in its conscious or unconscious return to "The Sentinel" as an original source text, and in its recovery of some of the literary and feminist issues elided by her associations with a variety of male mentors. In particular, concerns with sexual difference, femininity and motherhood emerge as complex forces in this novel.

Paying close attention to an apparently very limited time-frame, the first decade of a young writer's career, in fact opens up a broad and complex discussion which takes account of turn-of-the-century feminism, history and fiction as well as of the difficult and shifting parameters of "modernism", or "modernisms". In several recent critical reappraisals, canonical modernism has been reassessed as "one particular form of aesthetic practice, a practice committed to particular kinds of formal and linguistic experimentation ... privileged above others ... removed from the complex social and cultural specificities of history and located in that transcendent ideal of order of the literary tradition described (or invented) by Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'".[5] Peter Nicholl's *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* is, in part, a testament to the continued debates about and redefinitions of the period retrospectively labelled "modernism". The time span of the period of modernism itself has been as vigorously debated as its definitions, and the dates and parameters of "modernism" shift with changing critical perspectives.[6] In redefining modernism, the literary canon itself has been revised, particularly by feminist critics, who have discussed the ways in which traditional canons of modernism have privileged mainly male texts, with a few token works by women writers such as Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein.

Recent feminist criticism has done much to establish a tradition of "female

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[5]Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century,* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 10.

[6]See Lyn Pykett's *Engendering Fictions* and Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995) for useful summaries of various critical approaches to modernism and modernist writing.

modernism" as a way of reinstating hitherto neglected women writers:

> Feminist criticism directed toward rediscovery and reevaluation of the work of women writers has already altered our view of Modernism as a literary movement. It has testified to female experience in the social and intellectual settings of modern history and has examined the modes of entrapment, betrayal and exclusion suffered by women in the first decades of the twentieth century ... Feminist critical practice points toward - indeed, calls for reevaluation and redefinition of Modernism itself.[7]

Bonnie Kime Scott's anthology, *The Gender of Modernism*, discusses the new scope for modernisms opened up by a focus on gender difference. The experimental can no longer be the sole definition of modernism. Writers marginalised by sex, race, colonial backgrounds or lesbian inclination must be reconsidered in terms of the redefined boundaries of modernism. As Kime Scott says: "Modernism as caught in the mesh of gender is polyphonic, mobile, interactive, sexually charged; it has wide appeal, constituting a historic shift in parameters".[8] The concept of pluralism and interaction is central to any understanding of West's work. Writing self-consciously as women in a literary period apparently dominated by men, by a male literary tradition and by a new, male iconoclasm, West and other women writers of her time can be seen as artists writing with and against the traditional grain. West as journalist and novelist can be seen as negotiating a path of difference between the old and the new, between literary fathers and literary mothers.[9] Using this negotiation as one point of reference, I will argue that whilst the recovery of West into the fold of "feminist or female modernism" has been very important for a re-assessment of her work, her writerly position is more ambiguous and complex than this suggests.

The existence of "The Sentinel" manuscript illustrates some of the sources of this

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[7]Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank* (London, Virago, 1987), p. 6.
[8]Kime Scott, *Gender of Modernism*, p. 4.
[9]See Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter, (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 243-270 and Gillian Beer, *Arguing with the Past: Essays in Narrative from Woolf to Sidney* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

complexity. In its unfinished and unrevised state, the novel is a document of transition, revealing some of the different literary traditions, (the New Woman novel and the suffrage novel, for example) which influenced West's developing aesthetic.[10] The range of discourses and theories, literary, scientific, sociological and political, proliferating at the end of the nineteenth century and evident in this novel, have become the focus of several literary and historical rereadings of this period. Many of these revisionist approaches highlight, even centre on, the impact of redefinitions and new representations of "woman" in fiction and in society at large. In his seminal study of transitions in literature at the turn-of-the-century, Peter Keating notes that "The general reaction against Victorianism and the doctrine of realism both pointed to the overthrow of mid-Victorian fictional stereotypes, and those of women were prominent".[11] Indeed, the nature of "woman", of femininity and the strengthening ideologies of early twentieth-century feminism, not only became contested sites of meaning, but metaphors for radical change in a variety of ways.

There are a growing number of critics who have turned towards a more interdisciplinary approach to re-assessing these radical changes. Drawing on the methods of New Historicism and cultural studies, these critics and others are engaged in the very project Debora F. Jacobs called for, the need to read the literary alongside other twentieth century discourses.[12] Lyn Pykett in *Engendering Fictions* and Rita Felski in *The Gender of Modernity* utilise a number of earlier critical works, in order to approach turn-of-the-century literature and early modernist writing through an analysis of the emergence of multiple

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[10]A variety of recent critical works on the New Woman novel discuss this and other "feminine" genres in relation to "the making of modernism". See Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago, 1994); Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990) and Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the 'fin de siècle'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[11]Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), pp. 166-7.

[12]"Feminist Criticism/Cultural Studies/Modernist Texts: A Manifesto for the '90s'" in Lisa Rado, ed. *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 292.

representations of femininity in relation to modernity and modernism.

Felski's assertion that during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, "[i]ncreasingly, images of femininity were to play a central role in prevailing anxieties, fears, and hopeful imaginings about the distinctive features of the 'modern age'" provides a useful starting point.[13] She and Lyn Pykett trace the mutating and transforming definitions applied to 'the feminine' and femininity, from different perspectives. Exploring the *fin de siècle* gender crisis, Pykett states that:

> These debates about the representation of women, or of those more numinous and essentialist concepts 'woman' and 'the feminine', also extended beyond the discourse of politics into the discourses of law, medicine, and literature .... The representation of 'woman' and/or the feminine was also central to the emerging 'new sciences' of anthropology, sex psychology and sexual pathology.[14]

Lyn Pykett examines the discourses of degeneration and renovation out of which contradictory versions of femininity and indeed feminism arise. Out of this complex history of representations, she aims "to explore a range of contesting and contradictory discourses on gender, discourses on 'woman', the feminine, and feminism, and, especially, discourses about the political and aesthetic representation of 'woman' or women".[15] This range of "contesting and contradictory discourses" provoked and contributed to the complex theories of early twentieth-century feminists.[16] Felski, tracing the shifting and gradually more negative representations of femininity through the relation between modernism and modernity, offers another useful paradigm. While discussing the developing connections

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[13]Felski, p. 19.

[14] Pykett, p. 15. For other useful explorations of the "cultivation" of femininity during this time, see Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1987) and Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London, New York: Routledge, 1989).

[15]Pykett, p. 2.

[16]See, as an example, Debora Jacobs's discussion of Olive Schreiner's writing as both a challenge to and reconstitution of traditional gender categories. Lisa Rado, ed., *Rereading Modernism*, pp. 273-295.

between mass culture, mass consumerism and femininity,[17] Felski highlights from another angle the different attributes assigned to 'femininity' in turn-of-the-century culture. Tracing the oppositions between femininity as representing something primitive and outside history as well as being manifestly modern, between woman as victim and woman as consumer, and between woman representing moral superiority as opposed to the feminine as moral laxity and artifice, Felski also examines ways in which these definitions affect and are affected by aesthetic and feminist theory. Most important, at this juncture, is Felski's insistence on "an understanding of history as *enactment*" which "situates femininity in its multiple, diverse, but determinate articulations, which are themselves crisscrossed by other cultural logics and hierarchies of power".[18] She argues persuasively that "there can be no separate sphere of women's history outside the prevailing structures and logics of modernity".[19] Inside these prevailing structures, women's experience and representation of that experience must and will differ, and it is important:

> to acknowledge the female presence within those spheres often seen as the exclusive province of men, such as the realm of public politics or avant-garde art. By appropriating such traditionally masculine discourses, women helped to reveal the potential instability of traditional gender divides, even as their versions of these discourses often reveal suggestive and interesting differences.[20]

Fragmented Voices

The complexity of West's early writerly position also arises from the generic differences between fiction and journalism, the shifting perspectives evident within her non-fictional writings and between her fiction and non-fiction. Considering West's journalism collectively is problematic in itself. Not only is it scattered through a variety of papers and

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[17]See Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (Methuen: New York, 1985) and *Shopping With Freud* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[18]Felski, p. 21.

[19]Felski, p. 21.

[20]Felski, p. 22.

journals, remaining largely uncollected (except for Jane Marcus's and Bonnie Kime Scott's editions), but the diversity of themes and even perspectives are difficult to categorise or find coherent. As a writer and a reviewer for numerous different papers which ranged in interest from feminist to socialist to liberal, West covered a multitude of subjects - education for women, fashion, definitions of feminism, theatre, contemporary fiction, the Great War and more. Her fiction too can only be described as unified in terms of its consistent attention to a female subject, and to the tensions and failures in relationships between the sexes. Thematically the non-fiction and fiction overlap, but their particular voice and style naturally differ. This is in part a consequence of the different requirements of fiction-writing compared with that of journalism. For West, the journalism was bound up with her need for an income and independence, with creating "a room of one's own". It provided a space and an incentive for the pursuits of an enquiring mind, a platform on which she could express her own, often radical and shocking ideas, but it was also a hindrance. West made her ambivalence about her profession very clear in a 1971 interview:

> I had no capital behind me, and I had to meet heavy expenses, so I had to engage in journalism. I had to write articles, and this is death to novel writing as, I think, is teaching in Universities. But I had another and nobler reason for taking to journalism. After the First World War one had to notice the world was changing. Heavens, how quickly, how dramatically, how drastically the world was changing. Can you blame me if I ran about the world watching it cast [sic] its old skin and put on the new?[21]

The "occasional" nature of journalistic writing was often restrictive, and she had little choice over which books she was asked to review or subjects to comment on. In addition to this, journalism was viewed with some ambivalence, at best as a lesser form of writing, and in the light of the history of the novel from the late nineteenth-century, a detrimental

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[21]Rebecca West, "The Novelist's Voice", Recorded 1976, *Kaleidoscope: Talks & Documentaries Radio* (15 March 1983), p. 5.

influence on the novel form itself.[22] As Lyn Pykett has pointed out, journalism, through which West was linked to modernity, mass culture and its associations with 'femininity', was antithetical to the emerging modernist aesthetic at the time.[23] West was ambivalent towards her profession not only because it prevented her from writing fiction, but because of its low aesthetic standing compared to literature. Aware of her doubly precarious position, as a woman writer and as a woman writer invading the traditionally masculine space of journalism, which was none-the-less classified as "other" in relation to emerging definitions of "High Art", West engaged with and often challenged these assumptions in her early non-fiction. As Lyn Pykett noted in her seminar paper, West's journalism in part records the apprentice novelist and reveals her "self-consciously construct[ing] herself as a modern woman of letters". A rereading of West's early journalism offers a more complicated version of modernism.[24]

The divisions between journalism and fiction in West's *oeuvre* have, to some extent been perpetuated by critics who have gendered the different genres she practised. Gloria Fromm's attack is the most representative: "One is almost tempted to say that she wrote fiction as a woman addressing women and nonfiction as a man speaking to men; and men were patently more important in her eyes than women, which means that fiction counted for less in the larger world of public affairs, the world inhabited by all the men who mattered to her".[25] The gendering of West's literary and journalistic voices touches on a number of issues that have been vigorously debated in recent re-assessments of women's writing in relation to

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[22]See Peter Keating's *The Haunted Study* for a useful discussion on the merging and separation of journalism from fiction.

[23]The perceived clash between journalistic writing and fiction is discussed in general terms in Pykett's *Engendering Fictions* and more specifically in an unpublished seminar paper "Politics, Modernism, and the Woman of Letters: Rebecca West's Early Journalism" (Delivered at the Literature and Politics Seminar, Centre for English Studies, London, 4 November 1996).

[24]Pykett, "Politics, Modernism and the Woman of Letters: Rebecca West's Early Journalism".

[25]"Rebecca West: the Fictions of Fact and the Facts of Fiction", *The New Criterion*, January, 5 (1991), p. 50.

modernism. Categorising West's journalism as 'masculine' is easily challenged, simply by briefly considering the variety of journals, papers and magazine types to which she contributed during the first two decades of the century. The journal that in many ways launched West on her literary and journalistic career, *The Freewoman* (later *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*), was originally a feminist journal aimed at a potential feminist audience, one which included men, but was made up mainly of women. West also wrote for more established and traditionally male newspapers such as *The Clarion*, *The Daily News*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Republic.* But many of the articles published in these papers were not necessarily aimed only at a male audience. In the series, "The World's Worst Failure", published in *The New Republic* in 1916, the intended audience is surely female, just as the confessional narrative voice is female. West also wrote articles and short stories for "women's magazines" during the twenties, again for a different audience, in a different register and with different topics. The variety of subjects addressed across these different papers contributes to other variations within West's non-fiction writing. Her articles vary from straight reportage - - for example, on women working in munitions factories in *The New Republic* - - to more creative and imaginative pieces arising from personal anecdote.[26] Rebecca West's work as a literary journalist is not easy to define, even within this relatively confining label.

West's writing cannot simply be divided up into a fictional voice and a journalistic voice. Certainly, critics such as Anne Surma have usefully highlighted the plurality of voices, texts and selves to be located in West's *oeuvre*.[27] But Surma too sees the fiction and

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[26]Kime Scott briefly discusses West's "masculine" and "authoritative" voice in *Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 2, (pp. 126-7) and her journalistic style and voice in Vol. 1, (pp. 208-241). In her paper, "Politics, Modernism, and the Woman of Letters", Pykett discussed the conflicts staged between different kinds of writing in West's journalism, commenting on her technique of embedding narrative, often a personal narrative, within her articles.

[27]Anne Surma, "Disputing Authorities: The Longer Fiction of Rebecca West", (Ph.D, University of Warwick, 1991).

non-fiction texts as essentially separate, suggesting instead that they "offer an account of women's oscillation between confidence and temerity in challenging traditional pillars of authority".[28] Loretta Stec also addresses the issue of diversity and multiplicity evident in West's texts, stating that: "[w]e can interpret many of West's generic, political and stylistic choices as 'investments' that provided personal pay offs in varying amounts of literary authority, money and fame".[29] In these accounts, variety in West's writing has been seen either as evidence of insecurity or as cynical professionalism. Such readings are not entirely unjustified, but they are also reductive to some extent. The diversity of "voices", not only between the fiction and the non-fiction, but within these different genres, needs to be addressed as part of the reassessment of West's early writing.

The fragmented voice as a feature of some women's writing has been highlighted by numerous feminist critics. Jane Eldridge Miller makes the point succinctly: "To be a woman in the Edwardian age, as Edwardian feminists from Maud Churton Braby to Rebecca West knew so well, was to live a double life, one that was alternately (or even simultaneously) Victorian and modern, repressive and liberating, traditional and radically new".[30] West's writing can be described as a form of polyvocalism comparable to that of her contemporary Dorothy Richardson, whose "essays, like her fiction, are polyvocal. She has a habit of ventriloquizing a series of views on a given subject and setting them in opposition to each other, so that it is difficult to see where she herself stands".[31] One of the sources of this polyvocalism arises from the problem of gender itself, and the difficulties of being a woman writer in a male-dominated domain. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out: "woman is neither

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[28]Surma, p. 9.
[29]Lorette Stec, "Writing Treason: Rebecca West's Contradictory Career", (Ph.D, Rutgers, New Brunswick, 1993), p. 11.
[30]Miller, p. 195.
[31]Pykett, p. 86.

wholly 'subcultural' nor certainly, wholly main-cultural, but negotiates difference and sameness, marginality and inclusion in a constant dialogue, which takes shape variously in [the] various authors, but with one end - a rewriting of gender in dominant fiction".[32]

Dorothy Richardson's reaction to this situation was a strong aversion to masculinity which had created a situation where "[L]ife is poisoned, for women, at the very source".[33] In her fiction, Richardson explores the alternatives to masculinity and ends up, some have argued, by "reappropriat[ing] the late nineteenth-century belief in the superiority of the womanly woman for her own kind of feminism, and for her own theory of fiction".[34] West's polyvocalism, both in relation to feminist and aesthetic issues, arises from a different reaction to the position of being a woman writer, though still keenly aware of the constraints male traditions have imposed on her sex. West's attitude towards the feminine and the womanly is more sceptical than Richardson's, preventing her from elevating womanliness to a form of sainthood. From her earliest writing she makes clear her opinion that men and women are equally flawed: "Idiocy is the female defect: intent on their private lives, women follow their fate through a darkness deep as that cast by malformed cells in the brain. It is no worse than the male defect, which is lunacy: they are so obsessed by public affairs that they see the world as by moonlight, which shows the outline of every object but not the details indicative of their nature" (*BL*, p. 3). Her ambivalence towards the meanings of "masculinity" and "femininity", both politically and in terms of aesthetics, emerge strikingly early, as "The Sentinel" manuscript reveals. This novel I will argue, shows West "think[ing] back through our mothers" as Virginia Woolf was to suggest woman writers should do in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), in a way which is not so evident in her first published fictions. Indeed, at the

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[32] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 43.
[33] Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel* (London: Virago, 1979), p. 222.
[34] Pykett, p. 86.

very beginning of her literary career, West's contributions to a feminist journal, *The Freewoman*, ironically facilitated her entrance into male-centred literary circles, most specifically that of Ford Madox Ford, illustrating vividly the contentions of many recent feminist literary historians that the history of early twentieth-century feminism and the history of early modernism are intimately related.[35] West's attitude towards her male precursors and mentors as a feminist and as an aspiring novelist is indeed ambivalent. What this ambivalence creates is a partial map of the period up to 1922. West's writings expose fracture lines along which a more masculine modernism is crossed by the feminist movement politically and aesthetically. Her early fiction can be seen to be exploring some of these very fractures.

Contesting and Contradictory Discourses: Methodology

The breadth and diversity of West's writing, even at this first stage, dictates an eclectic and flexible critical approach to her work. The discovery of "The Sentinel" manuscript required substantial archival and historicist research as part of the process of dating and identifying the text. My approach to this unfinished novel is feminist and historicist, placing it within broader literary and historical contexts as a way of exploring its significance as a *roman à clef,* not merely in relation to West's early writing but to its cultural moment as a whole. Its incomplete state and very uneven prose contribute to its interest as a primal text out of which West the novelist and journalist grew, revealing the ways in which contemporary feminism, preliminary literary contacts, the First World War and personal experience shaped her writing. Thus a sense of the historical, both as a political and aesthetic

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[35]See Carol Barash, "Dora Marsden's Feminism, the *Freewoman*, and the Gender Politics of Early Modernism", *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 49:1 (Autumn 1987), pp. 31-56. See also Lyn Pykett, Jane Eldridge Miller and Ann Ardis.

concept, remains central to my analysis throughout. At the same time, West's engagement with contemporary feminist and scientific discourses makes her writing rich with suggestion for late twentieth-century theoretical approaches. Where appropriate, certain theoretical paradigms will be utilised. Of particular interest are feminist, historicist, sociological and psychoanalytic theories, about the constructions of femininity; the impact of the male gaze and the "construction of the female body";[36] femininity as masquerade;[37] and the relationship between femininity, modernity and popular culture.[38] Many of West's essays written for *The Freewoman* and other papers invite these critical approaches, in particular "Nana" (1913) and "The World's Worst Failure" series published in *The New Republic* in 1916. For my reading of *The Judge* as a partial return to and rewriting of "The Sentinel", I draw substantially on Susan Stanford Friedman's psychoanalytic model for reading early drafts as the potential "textual unconscious" of the final text.[39]

Lyn Pykett and Rita Felski provide a possible methodology within which the diversity, difference and apparent contradictoriness of West's early writing can be explored. By liberating West's texts from the constraints of such oppositional categories as journalism and fiction, masculine and feminine and other binary opposites, and recognising that she herself deliberately set out to evade or avoid them, a new sense of West's own writing project

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[36]Numerous recent critical works attend to these issues, including John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in the Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993); Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Avon Books, 1975).

[37]Stephen Heath's "Joan Rivière and Masquerade" in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds., Victory Burgis et al., (London: Methuen, 1986) is seminal here.

[38]In addition to Felski and Pykett's work on these issues, Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-Modernism* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986); Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking* and *Shopping with Freud* as well as Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985) are amongst numerous useful discussions of these issues.

[39]Stanford Friedman develops this model through a series of articles and chapters on a variety of writers, including H.D., Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Stanford Friedman's "The Return of the Repressed in Women's Narrative" *Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 12 (Winter 1989) and variations on this article will provide an important base for my final chapter.

may be established. Felski and Pykett, as well as other literary and cultural historians, base their arguments around an analysis of turn-of-the-century texts, and such analysis provides a rich and diverse background against which to read not only the rise of early twentieth-century feminist movements, but also a wider range of texts, literary and otherwise, produced at the time. Pykett's "competing and intersecting discourses"[40] and Felski's analysis of the appropriation and adaptation of dominant discourses provide a flexible framework in which Rebecca West's fiction and non-fiction can be read. In fact, West herself provides a model for the reader strikingly similar to those outlined above, in her critical study, *Henry James* (1916). In her analysis, West compares a scene in *The Princess Casamassima* to a Titian painting:

> It is so like that Titian in the Prado which shows, against a window looking on a park where lovers walk in golden air under silver poplars, Venus lying on a satin couch while a young man makes music for her at an organ; her eyes are softly intent, and the youth thinks she is suspended over the world in his music, but really she is brooding on the whiteness of his skin beneath his black beard (HJ, p. 77).[41]

Here, West employs the work of one great master in order to illuminate the work of another. But her interpretation of the Titian painting is overlaid by a personal and feminist response that radically alters the possible meanings of the painting. Where Venus can initially be seen to represent conventional beauty and the object of the male gaze, both the spectator's and the musician's, West's response adjusts the view. In her reading, it is the musician and even the artist himself who become objects of desire in the eyes of Venus and thus of the woman spectator. West's appreciation of the master appropriates and overturns a masculine point of view and allows for possible rewriting and reinterpretation. West's own reading which, with

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[40]Pykett, p. 37. Lyn Pykett analyses early feminist movements and especially the production of *The Freewoman*, of which West was a part, as an illustration of these contradictory discourses.

[41]West's literal and metaphorical references to and analogies with fine art provide another important topic for discussion . See Margaret Stetz's "Rebecca West and the Visual Arts" and "Rebecca West's Criticism: Alliance, Tradition, and Modernism" for some helpful assessments of this aspect of West's work.

some elaboration, anticipates some contemporary feminist approaches, offers a possible approach to her own writing as an interpretive response to her time.

Although the main subject of this study is not Rebecca West and femininity, drawing on analyses of early twentieth-century texts in relation to modernity, modernism and femininity provides a central but flexible paradigm. In the first three decades of this century, feminism in Britain underwent some radical shifts, in response to the First World War and the granting of a partial franchise in 1918, and finally of a full franchise in 1928. West was active in various feminist groups during this period, and her writing, both journalistic and literary, must be considered within this context. Since feminism itself was a site of such contradictory and contesting discourses, intent on both breaking into the male-dominated public sphere as well as highlighting the necessity of political representation for women's special sphere (militant feminism and non-militant feminism respectively), West's engagement with these issues as a journalist (coded masculine) and as a novelist (coded feminine by some contemporary and more recent critics) must necessarily be complex. Some of these complexities will be explored in detail by keeping in play the diverse representations of femininity inherited from the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century anxieties, alongside an analysis of the consequences of such diversity for feminist politics and aesthetics during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter One

"The Sentinel" - An Unfinished Apprenticeship in Feminism and Fiction

Contexts

Following her father's abandonment of the family in 1901, Cicely Fairfield[1] and her two older sisters, Letitia and Winifred Fairfield, moved with their mother from London to Edinburgh. She had become both a suffragette and a socialist as a teenager in Edinburgh, publishing her first feminist piece at the age of fourteen in 1907.[2] By 1910, the family had returned to London where West took up a place (briefly) at the Academy of Dramatic Art. She became a Fabian in the wake of her eldest sister, Lettie, who had "joined the Fabian Women's Group as soon as the Fairfields moved to London".[3] These years, from 1907 to at least 1910, provided much of the material for West's first novel.

During this time, the women's movement in Britain was divided into two main bodies - The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), known as the 'constitutionalists' or 'social' feminists (led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett), and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), known as the militants or suffragettes (led by the infamous Mrs Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel Pankhurst).[4] Both movements had affiliations with the working class, although in both cases, these links were weakened over

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[1]According to Carl Rollyson, West was christened Cicely Isabel, but she adopted the spelling of Cicily (Rollyson, p. 6). The use of pseudonyms, most famously that of Rebecca West, is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Although "The Sentinel" pre-dates Cicely Fairfield's adoption of the pen name, Rebecca West, I will refer to her throughout as the latter for the sake of clarity.

[2]This was a letter published in *The Scotsman*. See Victoria Glendinning's *Rebecca West*, p. 30 and Carl Rollyson, *Rebecca West: A Saga of the Century*, p 12.

[3]Glendinning, p. 37.

[4]A great deal of information is now available on the women's movements during the early part of the twentieth century. Many of the following works have provided background material for this study: Lisa Tickner, *"The Spectacle of Women": Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987); Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf, 1984); Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); Les Garner, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty: Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1984); Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986); Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985).

time. Both movements were made up of smaller groups and breakaway groups and they all sought the vote for women. They were divided on how much importance was to be placed on the attainment of this vote, the means to win the vote and the kind of position women should have in society. The WSPU adhered to the idea of equal rights for women, to be attained through militant action, whilst the NUWSS followed the creed of social feminism, the declaration that woman's "separate sphere" should have political rights and representation. They were non-militant.

While the different women's movements were divided on strategies and on the emphases they placed on certain demands, they were all engaged with the difficult problem of trying to define and redefine the 'feminine' or 'the womanly' for feminism. As Lisa Tickner points out:

> Woman, or rather 'womanliness' was the linchpin in bourgeois ideology and a structuring category in the principle discourses of civil society (medicine, law, politics, education, the family). If woman was out of place everything was out of place. For those concerned with social stability it was the actual or potential change in the social place of women (limited though this was) which seemed the major threat to the security of the family, state and empire.[5]

Confronted with a variety of stereotypical views of the feminine, with associations of femininity with piety and the duties of motherhood inherited from nineteenth-century thought, alongside contemporary "scientific" evaluations of femininity,[6] early twentieth-century feminists had a difficult task. Jane Lewis points out that it was particularly difficult for "middle-class feminists to attack theories of sexual difference directly because of their purported scientific authenticity".[7] In fact, both the WSPU and the NUWSS accepted the general idea of the "woman's sphere", asserting with Christabel Pankhurst of the WSPU that

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[5]Tickner, p. 170.

[6]These theories contributed to contemporary debate about femininity and feminism, having been extrapolated from readings of Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary theory. Notions of degeneration and its links with femininity became topical in the late nineteenth century. For more details, see Pykett, Felski and William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994).

[7]Lewis, p. 82.

"when women voted, [they] would concentrate on 'the condition of the children, the housing of the people, ... the care of the sick and aged [and] the preservation of the home and family'".[8] For the NUWSS, "Society was unbalanced because the sex-bound characteristics and virtues of women were not politically represented. It was an argument based on an acceptance of the 'natural' sexual division of labour".[9] The acceptance of a 'woman's sphere' created a variety of contradictions and problems, especially for the WSPU which insisted on women's equality with men. 'Womanliness' and the woman's sphere became an awkward but fluid definition over which the suffragists and anti-suffragists tussled, "[T]he Womanly Woman was a rich conglomerate of partly contested qualities which neither the suffragists nor their opponents could afford to relinquish".[10] These different definitions which emerged through "scientific", feminist and literary discourses, fed directly into West's early novel about the sexual, political and intellectual education of a young woman who becomes a suffragette.

Discovering "The Sentinel": Identification and Dates

> "I don't think a writer can be good who doesn't use landscape. When Cissie was very young she wrote a novel she never finished. She couldn't have finished it; it would have been as long as life itself. But it was full of the most beautiful descriptions of - of all things! - the countryside round Hendon".[11]

Winifred Fairfield's memory of an early unfinished novel by Rebecca West helps to confirm the identity of the author of "The Sentinel". The manuscript appears to be a first draft written

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[8]Garner, p. 50.
[9]Garner, p. 13.
[10]Tickner, p. 226.
[11]This was a comment by West's sister, Winifred Fairfield, on landscape in fiction, quoted in a letter to me from Alison Macleod, Winifred Macleod's (nee Fairfield) daughter (20 October 1996). I am most grateful to Alison Macleod, niece of Rebecca West, for all her help regarding this manuscript and for permission to quote from our conversations and from her letters to me. References to material from Alison Macleod are abbreviated to AM.

in four school notebooks. It runs to over 260 pages, not including the few pages which are missing, either torn out or lost as a result of the binding coming loose. Some of the pages, particularly at the beginning of each notebook, are considerably worn and disintegrated, thus making the text very difficult, even impossible to decipher in places. The handwriting is reasonably legible throughout, although where words have been crossed out or overwritten, or where the ink has faded, transcription is difficult. Like the manuscript of *Adela*, the dark-to-light contrast of the ink suggests the use of a dip pen.[12] At intervals in the manuscript, corrections or additions are made on the *verso* or inserted above cancelled words or sentences. Some of the comments on the *verso* appear to be written in a different hand,[13] offering criticism or suggestions. Despite the missing pages, disintegrated margins and the lack of an ending, a remarkably coherent narrative emerges.

West never referred explicitly to this early attempt at fiction and her silence certainly contributes to its absence from the now detailed bibliographies that are available. Its existence has passed unnoticed also because of its use of the pseudonym, 'Isabel Lancashire' and the further accident of it being misread as 'Mabel Lancashire'. Cicely Fairfield is known to have used numerous pseudonyms, most famously that of the Ibsen's heroine, Rebecca West, in the play *Rosmersholm*. She chose this pen name when she began writing for the radical feminist magazine, *The Freewoman,* in late 1911 in order to avoid shocking her mother, who would have disapproved of her daughter's association with such a journal. From an early age, West also used a variety of pen names in her personal correspondence, some of which she made use of in her first attempts at fiction. For example, she often signed off as 'Anne' in correspondence with her sisters, and she used the same name for an early

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[12]See Antonia Till's introduction to *Adela* in *Rebecca West: The Only Poet and Other Stories*, p. 17.

[13]Alison Macleod believes some of these editorial comments could have been written by her mother. This is not only because the writing appears to resemble that of the young Winifred Fairfield, but also because "my mother was Rebecca's muse" (Letter from AM, 20 October 1996).

fragment, "The Minx".[14] While these names are well known, 'Isabel Lancashire' has never appeared before.

That 'Isabel Lancashire' was a predecessor of Rebecca West is evident from this text, not only because the handwriting is easily identifiable, but because there are strong narrative links between "The Sentinel" and the unfinished and posthumously published *Adela*,[15] the most obvious being that the heroines of both novels are called Adela Furnival. In addition to this, two pages of rough drafts of *Adela* are written in the back of the fourth and final notebook of "The Sentinel", providing further evidence that *Adela* was an attempt at reworking the abandoned "Sentinel", although West was to leave this second version uncompleted, too. Adela Furnival of "The Sentinel" is an orphan, living with her aunt and uncle in the manufacturing town of Cecilbourne. Her devotion to her studies at school is a prelude to her taking a degree in science at Leeds University and becoming a science mistress. In *Adela*, Adela Furnival and her mother, living in Saltgreave (an imaginary town which also features in "The Sentinel") are poverty-stricken and unable to find the money to supplement the scholarship Adela has won to study science, possibly at Leeds. *Adela* ends abruptly with the young rebellious heroine meeting the attractive architect Mr Arnold Neville on a visit to her wealthy aunt in the country. The same incident occurs much earlier in "The Sentinel", where Adela meets Neville Ashcroft at her aunt's country manor. Robert Langlad MP, who plays a significant part in "The Sentinel" is referred to briefly at the end of *Adela*. There are a variety of other characters from "The Sentinel" who reappear in *Adela* with slightly altered names and sometimes in different circumstances, which link these two closely connected texts.

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[14]The full name West uses for "The Minx" is Anne Telope. For further details, see the biographies of Rebecca West by Victoria Glendinning and Carl Rollyson.

[15]This extended fragment was first published in Till's *Rebecca West: The Only Poet and Other Stories*, pp. 17-59.

The fact that "The Sentinel" precedes *Adela* raises all kinds of problems about the dating of these early texts. The original manuscript includes no precise dates, but historical events and biographical details suggest at least in what year this text might have been written. There are several scenes in the narrative which are derived from events in the life of the militant movement, most obviously the onset of the hunger strike and the government practice of forcible feeding in 1909. Since this novel includes graphic descriptions of this aspect of the shared suffering of the suffragettes, the larger section devoted to Adela Furnival's suffragette days could not have been begun before the latter part of 1909 or, more likely, 1910 at the earliest. Another clue to the 1910 date is a reference in the novel to the girl scout movement, which only began officially in 1910.[16] Adela's purchase of a house in Hampstead Garden Suburb in the novel provides a further important source for both dating and attributing the text. This episode is autobiographical, based on the Fairfield family's relocation to this area from Edinburgh in 1910, when West joined the Academy of Dramatic Art as an aspiring actress. Adela's purchase of a house in Hampstead Garden Suburb and the narrative she weaves around the house creates a vivid map of the young Rebecca's experience of London at that time. As Victoria Glendinning points out: "Hampstead Garden Suburb and the adjacent suburb of Hendon were favoured by those members of the Jewish community who were less impoverished than those in the East End of London but less prosperous than those who lived in Hampstead or in Golders Green. Many of Rebecca's closest friends, from girlhood on, were Jewish".[17] These close ties with the Jewish community emerge very strongly in this novel. Adela's aunt, Mrs Manisty refers to "the racial secret in my nose" (S,

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[16]Baden-Powell began the Boy Scout movement in 1908. 1909 saw the emergence of self-styled Girl Scouts whose demands for recognition resulted in the formation of the Girl Guides Association in 1910. See Vronwyn M. Thompson, *1910... And Then? A Brief History of the Girl Guides Association*, (London: Girl Guides Association, 1990).

[17]Glendinning, p. 37.

p. 4, Book I, II, 7) and her brother, Arnold Weingartner is described as "lavishing his Judaic love of beauty and display on the wonderful gardens" (S, **p. 3**, Book I, II, 6).[18]

Even if "The Sentinel" was begun in early 1910, West could still have been working on it well into 1911, considering its length. If she was working on it in 1910/1911 and *Adela* is a reworking of this material, the date of the latter, given as 1910 by Rollyson in his recent biography, needs to be reconsidered.[19] If "The Sentinel" was written in 1910/1911, *Adela* might not have been started before 1911, and West could still have been working on it in 1912. This possibility is strengthened by an undated letter to Grace Jardine, in which West refers to learning to divide her attention "between you and my novel" (Princeton, n.d). In another undated letter, probably written later since West addresses Grace Jardine more informally here, she makes another curious reference to a novel: "O God! that novel! What am I to do!" (Princeton, n.d). These two letters were written in 1912.[20] The evidence of struggle in the letter and the unfinished state of *Adela* suggests that *Adela* is the likely subject of her letter.

Another important overlap reinforces this argument: the manuscript of *Adela* was found in an envelope with the manuscript of "Indissoluble Matrimony",[21] dated August 1911

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[18]Arnold Weingartner, who plays a very small part in this novel may well be a prototype for Mr Monpurgo in the *Cousin Rosamund* trilogy. Weingartner and Monpurgo may be based on Isabella Fairfield's employer, Emil Heinemann. She was a governess to his two daughters. For more detail, see Glendinning, Rollyson and West's own *Family Memories* (London: Penguin, 1987). West's interest and inclusion of Jewish connections in this novel, and her use of specific idiom and vocabulary probably comes from another source too: Lettie's experiences in the Jewish Hospital in Manchester. According to Alison Macleod, many of these people had recently arrived from Eastern Europe and spoke only Yiddish. Lettie had learnt some Yiddish in order to speak to her patients. (Conversation with AM, 5 November, 1996).

[19]It has previously been suggested that *Adela* was written even earlier, during West's mid to late teens. (Till, p. 17).

[20]Rollyson suggests these letters were written in 1912 on the basis of internal evidence. (Rollyson, p. 390). One important clue corroborating this claim is West's reference to a reprint of Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*. This was first translated into English in 1907 and republished in 1912. See Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) and Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden 1882-1960* (Avebury: Gower Publishing Company, 1990).

[21]Till, p. 17.

to April 1913 (Tulsa Archive). According to Glendinning, West began writing the story when she was still an aspiring actress, although the 1913 date on the manuscript suggests she finished it much later, while she was involved with the feminist journal, *The Freewoman*.[22] The short story was finally published in 1914 by Wyndham Lewis in his Vorticist journal *Blast*.[23] The inclusion of *Adela* in the same envelope may be only coincidental, but there is evidence within the *Adela* manuscript to suggest that these two texts were written during the same period. On the last page of the *Adela* manuscript, a reference to "Sumatra Crescent" is crossed out and corrected with "Garibaldi Crescent" (p. 58, Tulsa Archive) - the address given for Adela and her mother much earlier on in the story. In "Indissoluble Matrimony", the ill-matched couple live in Sumatra Crescent. This doubling of place-names suggests that West was at least thinking about her next fictional piece, if not writing it, whilst working on the subsequently abandoned *Adela*.[24] The apparent overlap in these two texts suggests that West was still struggling to rewrite "The Sentinel" as *Adela* in 1912.

The discovery and dating of "The Sentinel" suggests closer overlaps between West's

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[22]Glendinning, p. 39.

[23]There are several conflicting narratives about the origins and dates of this story which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

[24]The manuscript notebook in which "Indissoluble Matrimony" is written contains further examples of overlap. There are two fragments of fiction which precede "Indissoluble Matrimony", "The Minx" and "Ellen Yaverland". "The Minx" describes a brief meeting between sixteen year old Veronica Fawcett and Arnold Ivory, a native of Manchester and newly arrived in Edinburgh as an architect. The descriptions of Arnold Ivory are strikingly similar to those of Neville Ashcroft, architect from Manchester and admirer of Adela Furnival in "The Sentinel". In "The Minx" fragment, Arnold Ivory is described as having "an illusion of youth about his pale oval face and lithe body. His white skin was lineless, his grey eyes shone innocently under the smooth black brows, his unexpectedly scarlet mouth seemed dry and pure" (p. 4). Neville Ashcroft in "The Sentinel" "looked younger. For those grey eyes and his small, red, childish mouth he might have been twenty. Mrs Manisty considered the contrast of his glossy black hair and his peculiarly white skin unwholesome: she distrusted the velvety grace of his slim, languid body" (p. 3). Arnold Neville of *Adela* is another variation on this type, with his "slim hips, his straight black brows knitted in attention" (p. 53). For Adela, "The contrast between his black hair and his smooth white skin was unnatural but quite beautiful" (p. 54). The "Minx" fragments rehearse similar themes and characters in both "The Sentinel" and *Adela* and West returns to them again in *The Judge*. Although Rollyson suggests that "Arnold [Ivory] is clearly a patch on Richard Yaverland, the hero of *The Judge*" (Rollyson, p. 391), the somewhat sinister attributes Yaverland shares with Neville Ashcroft and Arnold Neville cast him more in the role of the would-be rapist of Ellen Melville in *The Judge* - Mr Philip James. Veronica Fawcett in "The Minx" fragment is a variation on Adela Furnival and a prototype for Ellen Melville.

early fictions than critics and biographers have hitherto suggested, highlighting an intense process of reworking and revision, in which the rawness and melodrama of "The Sentinel" was refined and curtailed somewhat in *Adela*, and polished further in her first published short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony". It is a process which illuminates West's literary and political apprenticeship, from suffragette to "freewoman" and then to literary "freewoman". Many of the preoccupations which arise in the unfinished "Sentinel" recur throughout this early period, surfacing again in *The Judge*. As a fictionalised version of her support for the movement, "The Sentinel" is West's most radical novel, unmodified by time and perspective. In *The Judge* (1922), which shares with "The Sentinel" a similar austerity and masculinity in its title, West draws a much briefer portrait of the heroine as a dedicated suffragette. The young Ellen Melville in *The Judge* is granted a restricted freedom and period of rebellion before events overwhelm her. The transformations of the first Adela Furnival ("The Sentinel") into the second (*Adela*) and finally into Ellen Melville, provide an important genealogy for the study of Rebecca West's early fiction.

"The Sentinel": Sources and the Story

West's choice of the pen name 'Isabel Lancashire' for "The Sentinel" is significant for several reasons; it appears to represent her first literary identity, it alerts us to the importance of names in her early writing and it offers a key to some of the autobiographical sources of the text.[25] Isabel was her second name (Cicely Isabel Fairfield) and her mother's

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[25]'Isabel Lancashire' is not the only name to have important resonances. In general, names with strong feminist overtones are a salient feature of West's earliest attempts at fiction. These overtones suggest not only affiliation but participation at a time when suffragettes were beginning to disguise themselves in order to avoid detection and arrest, and to use pseudonyms for similar reasons. The name of the heroine of "The Sentinel", Adela Furnival, is also resonant with affiliations and sources for the novel. Although Adela was a popular name of the day, it is not insignificant that the third of Mrs Pankhurst's daughters was called Adela, and as the story progresses, Adela Furnival is drawn closer into the fictionalised version of the Pankhurst family circle. Her unusual last name, "Furnival" may have been derived from the name of one of the Fabians, Dr F.J. Furnivall (1825-1910), who was "a pioneer of nineteenth-century scholarship" and "a social rebel and defender

name was Isabella. Lancashire as a county had numerous feminist associations during that period.[26] Mrs Pankhurst's WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union), established in 1903, had its roots in Manchester, at that time in the county of Lancashire. It was in Manchester, where Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney first interrupted a Liberal Meeting and were thrown out, that the militant activities of the WSPU first began.[27] The young Rebecca's choice of 'Lancashire' highlights her very strong identification with Mrs Pankhurst and the militant feminist movement of the time. This identification is reinforced by West's choosing Lancashire as the central setting for both "The Sentinel" and *Adela*. Manchester and other surrounding towns, fictional and real, feature in both novels.

West's involvement in WSPU activities in and around Edinburgh, as well as in Harrogate and Newcastle have been well documented, but few critics have considered the Lancashire setting of the incomplete *Adela* which, at first glance, seems to have little connection with West's early feminist experiences. The location of the heroines of both "The Sentinel" and *Adela* in the Manchester/Lancashire setting highlights its importance, as a point

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of women's rights" (William Benzie, *Dr F.J. Furnivall: A Victorian Scholar Adventurer*, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1983, pp. xi and 24). By adopting such a name for her heroine, West evokes associations of scholarship and left-wing views. (See also Norman and Jean Mackenzie, *The First Fabians*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, p. 148). Veronica Fawcett, the name of the heroine in the abandoned piece, "The Minx", ostensibly written by 'Anne Telope', recalls both H.G. Wells's Anne Veronica and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. It is a name which vividly conjures up a sense of feminist rebelliousness. The young Rebecca's penchant for pen names, evident in her correspondence with her sisters where pet names are often used, highlights at this early stage two central thrusts in her writing - literary aspiration and feminist affiliations. The self-conscious act of naming herself suggests not only playfulness but also a serious attempt to portray herself as an author.

[26]There is an interesting parallel between 'Isabel Lancashire' and 'Rebecca West' - both pen names make use of a Christian name and a name suggesting a place or direction. The name of the fictional town that appears in both "The Sentinel" and *Adela*, Cecilbourne, follows a similar pattern and offers a clue to the identity of the author of both stories - Cecily/Cicely and bourne. The clue can be unravelled further - bourne/born Cecil/Cicely. I am grateful to Julia Briggs for pointing out this name-play.

[27]October 13, 1905. They were subsequently imprisoned. Annie Kenney was a Lancashire mill worker who rose to prominence in the WSPU. For further details on the militant feminist movement, see: Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); Antonia Raeburn, *The Militant Suffragettes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973); Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain,1866-1919* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990).

of identification with the feminist movement, and also perhaps as a device to distance the young author from the autobiographical aspects of her narrative.[28] West also had strong personal links with the Lancashire setting through kinship and friendship. Both Winnie and Letitia Fairfield, West's older sisters, were involved in suffrage work and Lettie, the eldest, was a prominent figure in the movement, although this fact is rarely mentioned in modern accounts of the suffragette movement.[29] Lettie, already a qualified doctor, lived in Manchester for a while working at "the very small Jewish hospital there, an excellent little hospital where I got a lot of valuable experience, and there I had joined up with the residue of the Women's Social and Political Union ... that Mrs Pankhurst and her daughters left behind when they went to London".[30] During the year 1908 and part of 1909, Lettie was regularly listed as a speaker in Manchester in the WSPU paper, *Votes for Women*.[31] West joined her sister in Manchester for a weekend at least once.[32] This visit was recalled in a postcard from West to Lettie, which describes a visit to Portland and which states that "once one is on the island it is rather like the wasteground round the Jewish hospital at Manchester".[33] West's brief visit, her possible first-hand experience of campaigning in

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[28]In *The Judge*, West returns to the preoccupations of her early writing, but she places her suffragette heroine in an Edinburgh setting. In this much later narrative, the autobiographical portrayal of Ellen Melville is distanced by the irony of an older and more experienced author.

[29]According to Alison Macleod, both Winnie and Lettie addressed meetings standing on soap boxes and at street corners. She recalled the terrible assaults meted out to the suffragettes and the practice of kicking their ankles devised by the police to make them struggle more and therefore necessitate arrest. Winnie also described how she was careful not to get arrested as she contributed her income as a school teacher to supporting the family. (In conversation with AM, 5 November 1996).

[30]Brian Harrison: Conversation with Dr Letitia Fairfield on 17 February 1977, p. 1. Details about Letitia Fairfield's suffragette experiences are to be found in a number of interviews. The typescripts of these interviews are now held at the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London.

[31]This paper was established by Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence. The first number of the paper came out in October in 1907. Mrs Pethick-Lawrence became an important member of the WSPU leadership and her husband was also a staunch supporter of the movement.

[32]West recalled this visit to Manchester in an interview with Brian Harrison in 1974. My thanks to Professor Harrison for agreeing to discuss his interview with West and for supplying me with a copy of the transcript of this interview: "Interview with Dame Rebecca West at 48, Kingston House North, Princes' Gate, London, SW7 on 15 August 1974".

Manchester and also her sister's extensive experience of the city, partially explain the centrality of Manchester in her early fiction. There can be no doubt that for this novel, Letitia Fairfield was the young Rebecca's model, and that much of her inspiration and information came from her older sister.[34] As Rollyson points out: "Lettie proved more of an education for Rebecca than any formal school training. She was the trailblazer".[35] She also introduced West to Mary Gawthorpe,[36] a suffragette speaker and political organiser. Gawthorpe became one of West's "romantic heroines",[37] and her magnetic personality[38] and varied suffragette experiences provided another model and potential plot for "The Sentinel".[39] The influence, even collaborative imput of Letitia Fairfield and Mary Gawthorpe is evident through the portrayal of the heroine in the novel, Adela Furnival. As a hardworking student of science at school and aspiring schoolmistress, Adela is modelled on Letitia Fairfield's scientific

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[33]The postcard is dated 31 January with no year. Since it is addressed to Lettie at "Fairliehope" in Hampstead Garden Suburb, the suburb in London in which the Fairfields settled around April 1910, the postcard could have been written in 1911, but no earlier. This postcard is in Alison Macleod's collection, now held in the Lilly Library, Indiana University.

[34]Sheila Macdonald, who helped catalogue West's papers after her death, confirms the importance of Letitia Fairfield to this manuscript. In a letter to me she suggested there may have been some collaboration between West and Lettie in writing *Adela* (3 September 1997).

[35]Rollyson, p. 13.

[36]"Mary Gawthorpe's background included work as a schoolteacher, leadership and writing for early Labour Party and Fabian groups around Leeds, and participation in violent demonstrations for the WSPU". Bonnie Kime Scott, *(Refiguring Modernism Volume 1*, p. 37. See also Sandra Stanley Holton's *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Woman's Suffrage Movement*, (London: Routledge, 1996).

[37]Glendinning, p. 30. West's important friendship with Mary Gawthorpe is touched on by a variety of critics. A 1920 article notes that "She (West) had the good fortune to be thrown in contact with Mary Gawthorpe when she was still a schoolgirl, and that witty and lovable and courageous personality made her understand the character of the Feminist Movement and realise that this certainly was inspired by spiritual beauty and sound sense" (*Time and Tide*, February 9, 1923, p. 150, rpr. from July 16, 1920). Bonnie Kime Scott makes the interesting suggestion that "It may be Gawthorpe's influence that made the Fabian, utopian H.G. Wells such an attractive figure to the young West" (*Refiguring Modernism Volume 1*, p. 39). Apart from these comments, details about their friendship are sketchy.

[38]Lettie's own admiration for Mary Gawthorpe is evident in the interviews she gave in the 1970s: "Oh she was like a little fairy - tiny little thing, very dainty ... she must have been a very good schoolteacher because she'd a wonderful gift of exposition. She was an extremely attractive speaker, she was very witty and humorous ... nearly all the mythical hecklings, you know, ... really originated with Mary Gawthorpe, and the way she could win a crowd over, a riotous and hostile crowd, was simply marvellous, and Mary Gawthorpe and I made great friends" (Typescript of Interview with Brian Harrison, p. 3). In a 1976 interview with Linda Walker, Lettie describes Mary Gawthorpe with great enthusiasm again and notes that "Cissy (sic) knew her well" (Typescript of interview with Dr Letitia Fairfield on Sunday March 28 1976, p. 10, Wellcome Institute).

[39]Of particular interest are the similarities between some aspects of "The Sentinel" narrative and the details of Mary Gawthorpe's life, given in her autobiography *Up Hill to Holloway* (Penobscot, Maine: Travesty Press, 1962).

ambitions and perhaps on the careers of Mary Gawthorpe and Dora Marsden,[40] rather than on West's own school experience and desire to become an actress.

The story of Adela Furnival, B.Sc., schoolmistress turned suffragette, is both bewildering and luxuriant in its detailed insights into some of the preoccupations and concerns of its time. Divided into three books, which are again divided into chapters, the story begins in the Midlands in the fictional town of Cecilbourne, close to Manchester. It opens with sixteen-year old Adela in her science laboratory at school, wearied by work and the prospect of more work necessary to become a science mistress. Whilst she is devoted to her studies, Adela is rebellious about everything else - religion, the banality of the relatives with whom she lives, and the lack of good art and good literature in their home. A visit to a wealthy aunt occasions a meeting with a handsome architect from Manchester, who seduces her. She refuses his offer of marriage on the grounds that she does not love him, declaring that her response to him was merely the result of animal lust. It is from her rejection that the title originates; replying to Ashcroft's proposal, Adela explains: "No. I was the sentinel.[41] I should have guarded my citadel until the voice of the spirit told me to surrender. I obeyed a baser call" (S, **p. 12**, Book I, V, 23). This discussion about chastity and sexuality sets up one of West's main concerns in the novel - how to redefine and represent female sexuality. Having reached a position where the heroine should either fall pregnant, marry or die in the first twenty-four pages of her narrative, according to novelistic conventions, West chooses

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[40]Dora Marsden will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

[41]The title, "The Sentinel", is itself highly suggestive. Adela's association of the role of sentinel with the loss of her virginity is probably not unrelated to the existence of a social purity journal, entitled *The Sentinel*, published by Dyer Brothers between 1879 and 1900. One of the issues this journal focused on was prostitution. Significantly, too, West's earliest conception of *The Judge*, focused on a judge "who collapsed in a brothel, recognizing in his seizure that the woman he is with is the wife of a man he sentenced for murder" (Glendinning, p. 81). The associations between female sexuality and prostitution, rooted in late Victorian discourses, were a source of conflict and disturbance for many feminist thinkers and writers at this time. See, for example, Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*. I am grateful to Alice Staveley who alerted me to the existence of *The Sentinel* journal.

to break the narrative sequence completely and leap forward ten years to depict an older and wiser Adela, who has actually done none of these things, although she remains scarred by her first sexual experience. It is possible that this first section was written some time before the much longer second part of the novel, which begins with Book II.

Book II focuses on Adela, as twenty-six year old science-mistress, graduate of Leeds University and unexpected heiress. Joining the militant suffragette movement, the "Liberty Union" (based on the Women's Social and Political Union) because of her sense of social injustice evident in her home town, Adela is gradually drawn deeper and deeper into the militant wing of the movement. Adela's recent inheritance of a fortune seems to her another reason for joining the movement. Her money gives her independence and time (this utopian inheritance is not explored in great detail and lies uneasily alongside the suffragette theme). Her initial membership is an unemotional one, and the text traces her growing commitment to the need for woman's liberation. Inspired by the speech of the suffragette Mary Gerald (a character who closely resembles Mary Gawthorpe), Adela asks to join a deputation to Parliament, due to take place the next day. Before joining the deputation and going to prison, Adela meets a variety of women who are willing to endanger themselves for the cause, most importantly Leslie Macarthur and Maude Brooke. Following her involvement in this "rush"[42] on Parliament, she is arrested and sentenced to two months imprisonment. During her first imprisonment, Adela encounters Rosie Essletree, a vulnerable young woman awaiting trial for the murder of her baby. After her release, Adela meets the poverty stricken Agnes Kelly and offers her employment as her parlour maid.

Adela's involvement with the movement introduces her to left-wing politics, to by-

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[42]In October 1908, the public were invited by the WSPU to 'rush the House of Commons'. Jane Marcus, ed. *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (London & New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 308.

elections and the WSPU policy of keeping the Liberals out.[43] Through this involvement she attracts the attention of two young men with socialist inclinations and political ambitions: Matthew Race and Robert Langlad. Turning down the ardent suit of the younger Matthew Race who is standing for election as a Labour candidate, Adela decides to leave the movement and return to her relatives. Back in Cecilbourne, she visits a series of cousins who are opposed to the suffragette movement. These visits are really staged dialogues, setting up opportunities to air new theories and make criticisms. Marie Hereford and Evelyn Garnier are examples of poor mothering and complacency. Mrs George Furnival, a frustrated and bored wife who once had the chance to run her husband's business successfully, sublimates her desires through religion. Adela attends an evangelical meeting with her, providing the opportunity for an attack on religion.[44] After leaving Mrs George, Adela sets off for an evening with her cousin, Maude Seppel, who has bought tickets for a musical. Following this chaotic sequence of events, Adela somehow meets up with Mary Gerald again (there are several pages missing), is introduced to Psyche, a daughter of the Liberty Union's leader, and rejoins the movement. Having rejected Matthew Race, Adela falls in love with Robert Langlad MP, but she represses her feelings because of her guilt over her lost virginity. Adela's desire for Langlad and for motherhood is intensified and nearly destroyed by her harsh experiences in the service of the militant movement, where she endures another imprisonment, this time involving a hunger-strike and forcible feeding.

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[43]"Keeping the Liberal Out" became official WSPU policy in 1906 in opposition to the Liberal Government's refusal to address their demands: "Christabel [Pankhurst] announced that the WSPU would henceforth not only oppose all Liberal candidates, regardless of their personal points of view regarding women's suffrage, but would also maintain an impartial attitude towards all other candidates". (Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*, p. 70).

[44]The young Rebecca West probably derived the details of Adela's encounter with the sincere but ridiculous American evangelists, Brother Peter and Reverend Paul, from her mother's experiences. Victoria Glendinning notes that when Isabella Fairfield took her daughters back to Edinburgh after her husband's final departure from the family; she "got together some money by working for the American evangelists Torrey and Alexander on their British tour" (Glendinning, p. 21).

These are the bare bones of a narrative which includes, along with its indictment of contemporary educational practices and the social inequalities of class and gender, allusions to the 1905 Russian Revolution, discussions of vegetarianism and vivisection, colonisation and Empire, religion, the unequal medical treatment of women, and the nature of womanliness and motherhood. She also draws on a variety of contemporary discourses, including the militant rhetoric of the suffragettes and the scientific analyses of the eugenicists, absorbing as a matter of course new theories and technologies into her own personal dictionary of metaphors. For example, Psyche's control over her fear when facing danger is described in terms of aeronauts learning to overcome their air-sickness, and Adela's fevered vision after being released from prison and her hunger strike is compared to "the unreal, glazed aspect of the cinematograph" (S, **p. 142**, Volume 4, XXII, 56).

The profusion of issues in "The Sentinel" reveal the young Rebecca West as an avid reader and commentator on her time, a feature which was to remain characteristic of her later fiction. The layers of narrative and discourse which constitute "The Sentinel" reveal the workings of a young writer seeking her own voice and identity through a collage of sources - literary, oral and journalistic.

Writing "The Sentinel": Seeking a Political and Literary Voice

The novel is both derivative and experimental, as West adopts a variety of models which she either abandons or adapts. In trying out several different literary genres and voices, West also offers evidence of her own reading, which reveals sources of inspiration and influence, or examples of writing against which she was trying to define herself. Two of the most important models for "The Sentinel", the "New Woman" novel and the suffrage novel, will be considered. The ways in which West appropriated and deviated from these

models illustrate her eagerness to be experimental. Leaving the manuscript unfinished is indicative perhaps not only of West's recognition of its aesthetic failure, but also of some of the limitations of the genres she was imitating. The unstable experimentalism of this novel reveals a readiness for the more radical feminism evident in *The Freewoman* journal and for new directions in literature and art.

Kate Flint has suggested that the various accounts of reading offered by writers of turn-of-the-century fiction and autobiography "indicate how the activity of reading was often the vehicle through which an individual's sense of identity was achieved or confirmed. This frequently involved the assertion of practices or preferences which opposed that which was conventionally expected of the young woman within the family circle".[45] "The Sentinel" aptly illustrates this point, as the young author embarks on producing a comprehensive reading list in her novel, which traces the learning process of her heroine just as it reveals the patterns of her own education through reading. Living with her aunt and uncle in Part One of "The Sentinel", Adela looks about her with distaste at the "half a dozen volumes of *The Quiver* and a pile of Mrs L.T. Meade's [books] works" (S, **p. 2**, Book I, I, 3).[46] L.T. Meade is a source the young writer overtly acknowledges and criticises in the first of many allusions to reading material in the novel.[47] Early on in "The Sentinel", West situates herself and her novel by referring to anti-feminist and anti-new women novels, thus defining Adela Furnival

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[45]Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 14.

[46]*The Quiver* was a monthly illustrated magazine, "designed for the defence of Biblical truth and the advancement of religion in the homes of the people" (Michael Wolff et al., *The Waterloo Directory of Victorian Periodicals 1824-1900* (Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1976). L.T. Meade "can be regarded as representing a transition from mid-Victorian fiction designed for girls, to the twentieth-century school story", Deborah Gorham, "The Ideology of Femininity and Reading for Girls, 1850-1914" in *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of girls and Women 1850-1950"*, ed. Felicity Hunt (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 53. There are several useful studies of reading for Victorian and Edwardian girls and women. See for example: Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), Judith Rowbotham, *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[47]Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson both draw up comprehensive reading lists for their heroines in their early novels, *The Voyage Out* and volume one of *Pilgrimage* respectively.

against those around her. So Neville Ashcroft reveals his 'true' character by offering Mrs Humphrey Ward's heroine, Ellen Tanqueray, as an example of "[A] really nice woman" (S, **p. 5-6**, Book I, I, 10). In response to this obvious compliment to one of the most notorious anti-feminist writers of the time, Adela tries to discuss the "womanly woman" and feminism. Novelists who have been influential in a more positive fashion are also mentioned. Much later in the novel, George Eliot is referred to with more approval than either L.T. Meade or Mrs Humphrey Ward,[48] and George Meredith's *The Egoist* is cited with relish in reference to Adela's disguise as a man.[49]

While West supplied a list of writers through which or against which Adela defines herself, she also suggested reading matter, suitable for a would-be socialist and feminist. In fact, Adela's intellectual shortcomings and strengths emerge through her programme of reading. Despite her scientific ambitions and achievements, Adela is portrayed as lacking in knowledge in other areas, just as her character is described as lacking in passion and vitality. As a frustrated sixteen year old, she declares: "No, there's no Art here, ... Its like Love and Sin. I don't understand" (S, **p. 2**, Book I, I, 2). Adela's inadequate response to art is not her only limitation. Her friendships with Mary Gerald and Robert Langlad initiate a more political and philosophical education too. Adela has to confess that she has not read Nietzsche, a confession which shocks neither of her friends, who have of course read him: "They accepted it calmly, as they accepted all those strange limitations and obliqueness of

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[48] "The hell of thwarted desires is the most degrading that life can show, chilling the sun, changing the blood to water, blanching the brain. Women especially with their delicate sense of balance, know the uselessness of exploiting an individuality disorganised by hunger. George Eliot, perhaps the most sensible person who ever lived, realised this so strongly that she even broke down her enormous predisposition to respectability to love in peace." (S, **p. 121**, Volume IV, XIX, 14).

[49] "The tight shaped knickers and leather leggings revealed elegant contours, the graceful turn - it seemed too absurd that Adela Furnival [like Sir Willoughby Patterne] prim Bachelor of Science, should, like Sir Willoughby Patterne, have a leg" (S, **p. 125**, Volume IV, XX, 19). There are numerous literary and other allusions scattered throughout the novel, including references to Walter Bagehot and George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894).

vision to which the non-propagandist world was subject" (S, **p. 16**, Book II, I, 33). Whilst waiting to join a deputation, Adela reads Shelley and Leslie Macarthur reads Herbert Spencer.[50] During her convalescence after her first imprisonment and subsequent illness, Langlad brings Adela a selection of books to read: "'Man and Superman', 'News from Nowhere', 'The Man of Property', 'Three Plays by Granville Barker'" she murmured. 'How lovely! I should have read them long ago, I know. How did you know I hadn't?'" (S, **p. 42**, Volume II, VII, 20). The young Rebecca is perhaps here prescribing her own recent list of reading, material for the making of a Fabian and a political thinker.

The women's movement itself placed a great deal of emphasis on reading.[51] As Kate Flint points out in her discussion of autobiographical writing from this period, many of these writers "choose to locate crucial moments in their own development as occurring when they came into contact with a specific text".[52] Adela develops from a frustrated and bored reader of L.T. Meade's school stories and Marie Corelli's popular romances to a reader of G.B. Shaw, William Morris and T.H. Huxley. She becomes a reader and distributor of the WSPU publication *Votes for Women*. This publication specifically encouraged the act of reading:

> The publication itself provided information with which to argue one's case; for gaining a historical awareness of the social and political contributions made by generations of earlier women; for reliving contemporary history with the knowledge that one is recording the struggles of the current movement as an inspiration for future generations of women readers; and which

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[50]Shelley is cited regularly in suffragette fiction and autobiography as a source of revolutionary inspiration (See Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader*). The numerous references to "scientific" writers such as Herbert Spencer and Belfort Bax who contributed to the creation of a damaging scientific discourse defining women, reveal West's early interest in such debates. She challenges these writers publically in her journalism for *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*.

[51]In memoirs and interviews, West acknowledges the impact of her family as well as of school on her reading practices. She recalled the influence of "Gertrude Atherton, now forgotten" rather than Olive Schreiner at school and also that of Max Stirner's *The Ego* (Brian Harrison, Interview with Dame Rebecca West, August 1974). Gertrude Atherton was an American novelist who created heroines to represent "a re-vision not only of the roles of women and the relations between the sexes but also of civilizaton itself and the roles of nature and nurture" (*Women's Literature*, ed. Claire Buck, London: Bloomsbury, 1992). Max Stirner's philosphy of individualism in the *Ego and His Own* was also an important influence on Dora Marsden, editor of *The Freewoman*.

[52]Flint, p. 234.

acknowledged that reading could provide relaxation.[53]

West's own reading of *Votes for Women* is not only reflected in the close parallels in the novel with incidents reported in this feminist paper,[54] but in her self-conscious portrayal of characters reading this paper. Adela discovers her servant Agnes reading *Votes for Women* and they discuss its contents briefly. This paper is not the only one to be scrutinized in the novel. Adela is disgusted by the portrayal of the suffragettes and feminism in three papers she reads on a train journey. In *The Times* she finds "a long article on her own Cause" full of "polysyllabic hysteria" and a "turgidly vehement denunciation of any attempt to [move] improve the moral landmarks of this excellent State of Britain". The *Liberal Weekly* is not much better:

> she found an entertaining leader in which the editor raised a peppery invocation to the Deity to flay and bottle in boiling oil these viragoes which were at once defiling the Home and impeding Free Trade. This man used the word 'womanliness' with a curious meaning that she could not quite grasp. His Ideal Woman, like Adela's, [had] was asserted to own the genius for motherhood but her softheadedness [under] made the reader blench at the thought that this brainless creature was to be allowed to (be) perpetuate her kind.

She is most disgusted, however, by a literary weekly:

> In fairly plain language it incited the stewards at Cabinet Ministers' meetings to commit indecent assault on women interrupters...The paper fell from Adela's hands. Although hypocrisy had safely raised the two other articles to the standard of verbal decency, [she knew] here was their explanation. For the first time she clearly heard the voice of the Anti-Suffragist: 'Women, we do not want your nobility, we do not want your courage, your tenderness, your charity, your [self] intuition. We want just one thing! And that is not your Motherhood, though we talk so much of it, because the Mother must be wise and free, and we would have you sitting blinded by the twilight at the hearth, ripening for your animal functions. That is what we want! Your body. And if you choose to rise from the sensual world, why, we will fight you. We men have been your masters for so long, we have suborned so many of you to give your all to us, that we know many of your most poignant, delicate secrets. Yes! We will fight you with the weapon of your sex!' (S,

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[53]Flint, p. 236.
[54]These parallels will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

p. 68, Volume II, XI, 73-74).

Reading here functions on several levels. It summarises and documents certain contemporary attitudes towards feminism, offering West the opportunity to deliver a scathing critique of anti-feminist discourse by making explicit the sexual and demeaning nature of the ways in which women were defined. Reading illustrates quite clearly here its own important educational function and it also acts as a revelation and an incitement to militant action. Adela's indignant interpretation of the papers she reads leads her to see suffragism as "a Holy War" (S, **p. 68**, Volume II, XI, 74).[55]

How to Write the New Woman: Sex, Love and Passionate Friendships

As Adela becomes a more sophisticated and knowledgeable reader, thanks to her feminist and socialist associations, she develops a stronger sense of self and of the cause. West's self-conscious employment of the *bildungsroman,* as one way of creating a shape or structure for her novel, is reflected in Adela's contemplation of her own character development: "She smiled and wondered at her own development. The schoolmistress of a year ago had clung so rigidly to her unimportant and niggling work, fearing [lest in the wider range she] in the wider range the [humbling?] wrestle with ideas and [the] spiritual adventures, and those things connected with the flesh" (S, **p. 64**, Vol. 2, XI, 65). "The Sentinel" shares its *bildungsroman* form with characteristic modernist novels, such as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* and also with the earlier "New Woman" genre. Discussing the latter, Kate Flint points out that:

> Its preferred form is the *Bildungsroman*, and it shares a certain number of characteristics with nineteenth-century women's autobiography. ... [I]t presents a woman's life as process, stressing the value of continuity, even

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[55]There are several more references to a variety of daily and weekly newspapers in the novel, many of them indicative for Adela of the reader's political inclinations and character.

> endurance, and of adhering to often painfully learnt principles: principles which are self-generated and rationally arrived at, rather than being imposed by dominant social beliefs.[56]

While "The Sentinel" is incomplete and covers a relatively brief stretch of Adela Furnival's life, it shares other important characteristics with the "New Woman" novel. Reviled by most and celebrated by some, the "New Woman" novel was characterised by a new and shocking candour about sexuality and a rejection of traditional representations of 'woman'. As Ann Ardis notes: "the 'natural' inevitability of the marriage plot is challenged as New Woman novelists 'replace' 'the pure woman,' the Victorian angel in the house, with a heroine who either is sexually active outside of marriage or abstains from sex for political rather than moral reasons".[57] Closely connected with this new genre was the 'sex novel' or "the preoccupation of early twentieth-century novelists with questions of sexual psychology once the constraints of Victorianism had been cast away".[58] Sexual frankness demanded a realism associated with French naturalism and its English practitioners. Adela's swift and unexpected sexual response to Ashcroft, the discussions of prostitution in the novel, and the sexual crises triggered off by the declarations of her two admirers, situate the novel within a "New Woman" framework.[59]

Numerous critics have highlighted the instability of the category of the "New Woman". Some "New Woman" writers advocated sexual purity for women whilst others

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[56]Flint, pp. 294-295.

[57]Anne Ardis, p. 3. Other useful accounts of the New Woman are: Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity*, Jane Eldridge Miller's *Rebel Women* and Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar's "Home Rule: The Colonies of the New Woman" in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2 *Sex Changes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 47-82). See also Sally Ledger, *The New Woman*, Lyn Pykett's, *Engendering Fictions* and *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London and New York: 1992) and Juliet Gardiner, *The New Woman* (London: Collins and Brown, 1993).

[58]Keating, p. 166.

[59]These incidents are strikingly similar to those described in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*. Rachel Vinrace is both sexually attracted to and repulsed by Richard Dalloway. The revelation of her own sexuality is in some way paralleled with her awareness of the profession of women who haunt Picadilly. Adela's discovery of her own sexual responsiveness is also juxtaposed with her discovery of the practice of prostitution.

embraced the doctrine of 'free love'; motherhood was both celebrated and attacked. As Sally Ledger notes: "The elusive quality of the New Woman of the *fin de siècle* clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently homogeneous culture of Victorianism which could not find a consistent language by which she could be categorised and dealt with".[60] By creating a heroine with a complex sexual history, West explores contemporary anxieties about female sexuality, reflecting not only a major preoccupation in much late Victorian and early twentieth-century writing, but also her own. The schoolgirl Adela's refusal of a marriage proposal after her brief relationship with Neville Ashcroft is both derivative from earlier novelists and experimental, provoking a complex, sometimes contradictory portrayal of sexual beliefs and conduct.

> My sin is not that I gave myself to you without the sanction of the law. It may be an important point, but somehow I've lost sight of it myself. My sin was that I gave myself to you without the sanction of love. I am not in love, I never have been. That night I obeyed an animal craving. I can't alter that by giving myself to you again. (in marriage) (S, **p. 11-12**, Book I, V, 23)

In Hardyesque fashion, West tries to depict Adela's discovery of her own sexuality, and the rightness of this sexual nature in relation to love but not lust.[61] Adela's sense of shame over the nature of her sexual awakening is exacerbated by her involvement with the suffragettes. Her growing sense of having been defiled, thus making her a traitor to the feminist cause and to the man she loves, may also derive from the doctrine of purity and bodily control upheld by the WSPU: "Women were to become a force in the public sphere, to take over and control

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[60]Ledger, p. 11.

[61]The storyline and language are derivative of earlier "New Woman" novels, although it is possible to speculate that West based this incident on her own experience or the experience of someone known to her. There is no reference to any comparable incident in either West biography, although curiously, West does mention the "little Archietect (sic). To whom I send my love" (AM Collection), in an early undated letter to Lettie. The reference is obscure and gives very little away. Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was no doubt influential for West's formulation of the early part of her novel. Mark Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood* (1896) may well have been another important influence, although West refers to neither novelist in "The Sentinel". In *Clara Hopgood*, Madge Hopgood refuses to marry, despite being pregnant, because she realises she is not in love: "Whatever wrong may have been done, marriage to avoid disgrace would be a wrong to both of us infinitely greater" (Mark Rutherford, *Clara Hopgood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936, p. 62).

the public arena by the strength of their superior morality. This naturally meant a rigorous purity in regard to sexual matters, combined with a strong sense of bodily control".[62] But Adela's attraction to Langlad whose "face was extraordinarily refined and was bisexual in its masculine ruggedness" (S, **p. 15**, Book II, I, 30), suggests a very different source of ideas, the works of Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter rather than the doctrines of the Pankhursts. West would have been familiar with the writings and ideas of Ellis and Carpenter through her Fabian connections at least.

While the uncertainty of Adela's views are unexpected in comparison with West's outspoken and assured views about sexuality expressed in the *The Freewoman* (from late 1911), what is more striking is the novel's attempt to explore and represent Adela's second sexual awakening and desire. In addition, West creates male suitors for Adela who are innocent and whose own sexual awakenings are as *bouleversant* as Adela's. The way in which Adela and Robert Langlad experience desire for each other and deny that desire is set up as a deliberate contrast with the Adela/Neville Ashcroft relationship. This is made clear in the description of Adela's realisation of her love for Langlad:

> It struck her that she was in the grip of a [strange] tremendous sexual experience. Terrified, she turned to consideration of her physical excitement. It's violence tortured her: she wanted to cry out, to cut herself, to throw herself from the swinging train as relief from the agonising thirst of her body. She felt herself forced back to the degradation of eleven years ago. With a gasp of thankfulness she knew a difference. Under that outrage she had smouldered with a gross passive passion: now she burnt with an ardent flame, pure and aggressive. But under any conditions she hated this animal thing. (S, **p. 106**, Volume III, XVII, 68-69)

Symbolically, Adela recognises her passion as the train in which she is travelling with Langlad emerges out of the darkness of a tunnel into the sunlight. Langlad's awakening

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[62]Vicinus, p. 252. The most extreme example of this doctrine appeared in 1913 in Christabel Pankhurst's *The Great Scourge and How to End It*. Writing for the *New Freewoman* by this time, West was unsympathetic towards the extreme attitudes voiced there.

earlier in the narrative is described in similar melodramatic and physical terms as he gazes on Adela's sleeping body: "His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, he almost sobbed" (S, **p. 58**, Volume II, X, 56). The language of these revelations is characteristic of "New Woman" and sensation fiction, which employed conventions of "melodrama, gothic, sensationalism and the domestic".[63] West draws on these conventions, not always very successfully, in order to depict what had been previously unrepresentable - the physical sensations of desire and the language of the body.[64]

The approach to female friendship within the suffragette movement and its preoccupation with feminine beauty is another radical point of departure in this novel. Whilst the possible romance between Adela and Robert Langlad becomes a driving force in the narrative, it is a force for absence, denial and sterility. It is the suffragettes whose beauty inspires admiration and aesthetic appreciation and whose courage and example fire Adela's imagination and her devotion to the cause. Glenda Norquay's assertion that it is the spiritual and political dimension that tends to be emphasised in suffragist texts,[65] is partially applicable in this narrative, but West also goes beyond this, eroticising the spiritual and political. Her attention to female beauty in early published articles and stories[66] is a salient feature of her writing around this time, and the friendship that develops between two women in her first published novel, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), has a rare intensity. In "The Sentinel", the attention to female beauty and friendship is celebratory and romantic. And Adela's love for Robert Langlad is not at odds with her female friendships which can only be described

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[63]Pykett, *The Improper Feminine*, p. 6.

[64]A full study devoted to this aspect of the novel cannot be undertaken here. West's exploration of taboo subjects and the way in which the novels seeks to investigate "altered states, altered languages, and the horror of repressed desire and its monstrous power" (anonymous reader of my typescript of "The Sentinel") is, however, one of the most interesting and radical aspects of the novel. The striking affinity between this early work and D.H. Lawrence's fiction is another area that requires further exploration.

[65]Glenda Norquay, *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women's Suffrage Campaign* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 12.

[66]See "Nana" (*The New Freewoman*, 1 July 1913) and "Indissoluble Matrimony" (*Blast 1*, 20 June 1914).

as consciously erotic. Such friendships extend, in a different way, the familiar conventions of romance, conventions which had already been overturned by Adela's first sexual encounter. The narrative consists of a series of portraits of women whose beauty and goodness or courage is captured through a preoccupation with female portraiture. This attention to feminine beauty becomes focused on the body of the suffragette.

Framing Women's Bodies

Portraits of women or the comparison of women with paintings provides a continuing theme in a novel cluttered with ideas and events. The woman painted is the woman looked at and desired, the woman controlled.[67] This theme is established early on in the novel, when Neville Ashcroft invites the young Adela to his rooms in Manchester, promising to show her the picture he is painting of her. Attracted and curious, Adela accepts the invitation and finds herself looking at another portrait, "a big flaunting portrait of a lean girl with red hair and amber eyes which had been painted by a boy whom the British Public with poor artistic taste but excellent morality had allowed to fall asleep on the Embankment one snowy night some years before" (S, **p. 8**, Book I, IV, 15).[68] The red-haired woman with amber eyes is a recurring image in the novel. Much later in the narrative, Adela meets an artist in London whose frescoes adorn the walls of a luxury hotel: "Adela looked up at the red-haired girl, flank-deep in [golden] bracken, who stared from the walls with hot amber eyes, and back again at the young man [with] in the [weird] eerie tweed-suit" (S, **p. 101**, Volume III, XVII,

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[67]Significantly, this preoccupation with female portraiture as a symbol of oppression in the novel was given a literal application in 1914 when Mary Richardson slashed Velasquez's *Rokeby Venus,* in protest against the re-arrest of Mrs Pankhurst. It was "an attack on representation - in particular on the inadequacy of women's representation in and by patriarchy" (Janet Lyons, "Militant Discourse, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War" in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 4.2, 1992, p. 121).

[68]This artist seems to have Pre-Raphaelite leanings, although I have not yet been able to establish an exact identity.

61). This same artist compares Adela with an Alfred Stevens painting.[69] Adela's first encounter with the "red-haired" portrait in the rooms of Neville Ashcroft, is a prelude to her seduction later that day. Desired by Ashcroft who paints her picture and confronted with her own objectification in the portrait, Adela is first depicted as the woman who is looked at. It is a theme which has become central to late twentieth-century feminist theory, where "Men make images showing men as important actors and sufferers, while women are signs of their desires and requirements".[70] Part of Adela's reason for becoming a suffragette is to redefine her self as distinct from the male gaze. Her first experience of a pre-election meeting at West-Saltgreave is delightful to her, because her presence is treated as political rather than sexual: "Not often to the average woman comes the joy of being treated by a man as a human being. Sex is hidden away into its proper intimate shrine" (S, **p. 56**, Volume II, IX, 50).[71] Becoming involved in politics offers the opportunity to enter a new sphere of self-definition. Paradoxically, her political involvement leads to a complication of romantic and sexual demands.

But the image of the beautiful woman who is looked at, is not only a critique of the male gaze and all its implications, it is also an attempt at creating a space for the woman who

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[69]Alfred Stevens (1882-1906) was a Belgian painter. What is significant about this allusion is its reappearance in *The Judge* (1922). Ellen Melville, looking at her dying mother, remembers a dress:

> It was, Ellen reflected, just such a dress as the women wore in those strange worldly and passionate and self-controlled pictures of Alfred Stevens, the Belgian, of whose works there had once been a loan collection in the National Gallery. Her imagination [...] assumed for a moment pictorial genius, and set on the blank wall opposite the portrait of her mother as Alfred Stevens would have painted it. Oh, she was lovely standing there in the shadow, with her red-gold hair and her white skin, on which there was a diffused radiance which might have been a reflection of her hair, and her little body springing slim and arched from the confusion of her skirts (*J*, p. 188).

The picture of the red-haired woman appears at crucial moments in Adela's life, usually when she is the object of someone's desire - the salacious desire of Neville Ashcroft or the loving desire of Robert Langlad. The pattern of portraits in the novel symbolises at once an aesthetic appreciation of female beauty and a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed.

[70]Catherine King, "The Politics of Representation: A Democracy of the Gaze" in Frances Bonner et al. eds., *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p. 134.

[71]Alison Macleod related some of Lettie's recollections about her youngest sister's distress at unwanted attentions from men whilst involved in suffragette work. (In conversation with AM, 5 October, 1996).

looks. Having set up one theme through the image of the portrait, West extends this motif, and explores the possibilities for women as the spectators of each other. Adela's appreciation of female beauty is evident throughout the novel, an appreciation which is emblematised by the statue of the nymph holding up a sundial in her wealthy aunt's garden. Intervening in a debate as to whether the sundial was purchased as an artwork, Adela notes that perhaps it was bought simply because "the slender body of the nymph swathed in wind-swept draperies, straining upwards to present the dial to the sunlight" (S, **p. 4**, Book I, II, 7), was beautiful.[72] Adela is also depicted as the unashamed spectator of feminine beauty in the flesh, in ways which anticipate the regenerative qualities of the female body for the narrator in her 1913 essay, "Nana". The attraction of the tea room in Cecilbourne is the waitresses: "They moved their exquisitely moulded bodies with such super-terrestrial gravity of grace, their ears [only] open to only the songs of the stars. Sometimes Adela wished to be a man, so that she could marry a waitress. But one would need to be an Apollo" (S, **p. 87**, Volume III, XIV, 26). Maude Seppel's beauty is also a source of inspiration and adoration for Adela, "always a willing captive to pretty women" (S, **p. 89**, Volume III, XV, 30).[73] Maud, who possesses "the dangerous sensual loveliness of the Iberian Celt" is compared to a masterpiece, a work of art and to great musical compositions (S, **p. 89**, Volume III, XV, 30). Whilst Adela appreciates Maude's loveliness as an erotically charged artwork, she also disapproves of Maude's "selling the rights of possession over her beautiful person for the name and position of Mrs Graham Seppel" (S, **p. 88**, Volume III, XV, 28).[74] But Maude is

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[72]Ironically, Adela's aesthetic appreciation transfers Ashcroft's attention away from the nymph and towards her. Beauty and an appreciation of beauty confers vulnerability in much of West's fiction. The figure of the nymph recurs in *The Return of the Soldier*, emblematic of feminine loveliness but also of fragility and fickleness.

[73]Maud Seppel in *Adela* is similarly beautiful and attracts the admiration of men and women alike. "To Adela, possessed by the blind infatuation for beauty common to schoolgirls, she appeared to have reached the high tide of miraculousness" (A, p. 21).

[74]Once again, the parallels between this passage and the descriptions of Maude in *Adela* are striking.

frivolous and superficial in comparison with the serious Adela who has just emerged from her first experience in prison as a suffragette. Looking on the physical loveliness of these women is a passive, aesthetic experience for Adela. Looking becomes a different experience amongst the suffragettes.

Detailed attention is paid to the physical appearance of the women Adela encounters when she joins the movement. This attention is not merely a feature of "The Sentinel", it is drawn very obviously from the fierce debates of the time, over how to define "woman". This was particularly so for writers of suffrage literature, as Glenda Norquay points out:

> For writers in this arena ... the whole issue of representation was complex, potentially serious and extremely important. The depiction of women is an important issue in many kinds of writing but patterns emerging from suffrage literature indicate a particularly fierce fight in the battle over 'woman'. ... On such a battleground, how women 'appeared' - how their faces, clothes, bodies, voices, actions, lives were depicted - could not be read as neutrally descriptive. The authors were, after all, making conscious choices in their intervention into the political arena.[75]

Characteristically portrayed by anti-suffragists as manly and unattractive, suffragists and particularly suffragettes went to great lengths to emphasise their femininity and "womanliness". In the case of the suffragettes, this emphasis was represented by careful attention to dress, so that long dresses and large hats were always worn, often in the most inappropriate situations. As Vicinus notes: "The ethereal sexuality suffragettes projected emphasized the importance of femininity and feminine values even as women were performing unfeminine acts".[76] Adela's suffragette friends; Mary Gerald , Psyche Charteris, and Leslie Macarthur, are all depicted as slight, fragile-looking women, like their real-life counterparts. When she first meets Psyche Charteris (whose older sister, Britomart, is a more

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[75]Norquay, pp. 11-12.

[76]Vicinus, p. 264. For more details see Felski, Tickner and Lyons. The issue of "dress" or fashion, femininity and feminism remained controversial in post-war feminism and it is a theme to which West often returned in her fiction and journalism.

shadowy figure), Adela is struck by her child-like appearance. Sharing a room in a hotel, Adela watches the sleeping Psyche in a reversal of an earlier incident where Robert Langlad comes upon Adela asleep; her sleeping figure awakens Langlad's love and desire.[77] In a re-enactment and rewriting of this moment, Adela watches Psyche's sleeping face, realising that:

> Psyche's character had had the same tremendous effect on [her] that the sudden entry into a strange scene or hearing of a new development of music exerts on perceptive minds. The austere, faery conformations of her character, the daring rectitude that was exploited to its utmost by her unflinching temperament, the concentration of her passionate faculties in certain noble and impersonal objects, were phenomena as rare, as novel as those. (S, **p. 95**, Volume III, XVI?, 51)

Looking at Psyche sparks off a revelation, an almost Proustian moment which goes beyond the experience of the aesthetic to a quasi-religious response. The nature of this erotic and near religious reaction is again suggested through the description of Psyche's body:

> The moonlight of the brilliant crescent soaked through the blind and lay on Psyche's body, stretched sword-straight under the white linen. Adela wondered, thinking on into the midst of her gathering sleep, to what new ordeal this implacable young warrior would lead her. It occurred that this constant expectation of fierce and sudden engagements at arms must have been alien from the minds of men except colonists or explorers since the Middle Ages. The difference struck her as Psyche laughed in her sleep, that she had no fear of defeat. The aggressive act itself was a victory. [She exulted] The thought of her warlike future filled her with exultation; in the [delirium] pleasing delirium of contented drowsiness she felt infinitely novel, heroic, picturesque, while the cool conscience of her mind recognised that in the harsh daylight her will would thrust her flinching body inch by inch to the brutality of modern warfare. (S, **p. 96**, Volume III, XVI?, 52)

This extraordinary passage mingles Keatsian imagery[78] with the militant rhetoric of the WSPU. Seeking a language in which to represent this scene, West again seems to be

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[77]Langlad's awakened passion is a revelation to him. In a state of intoxication he experiences his encounter with the sleeping and unguarded Adela as a form of consummation. The scene is an overwritten version of Keats's "On the Eve of St Agnes", romanticizing and dramatizing the moment of perception. Keats was one of West's first literary models and some of her earliest poems are derivative responses to his poetry: "But when I come to die I will be one/With the full-throated nightingale", "The Call of Pan" (Unpublished juvenilia, AM collection).

[78]"Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,/And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast", "The Eve of St Agnes" in *The Poems of John Keats 1795-1821*, ed. Miriam Allott, (London: Longman, 1970), lines 217-218, p. 467.

responding to the eroticism of the gaze in "The Eve of St Agnes" and reworking it for her own purposes. This intimate, domestic scene is juxtaposed with a portrayal of the suffragettes as modern soldiers whose violent physical confrontations with the public and the police resemble the hand-to-hand combat of medieval warfare. Psyche's "sword-straight" body symbolises the movement whose "militant speech acts took as their referents the bodies of WSPU members".[79] It is also, ironically, a phallic image with erotic implications. The motif of the militant body is extended further into the realm of the erotic when the bruises on Psyche's body, sustained in "battle", become the inspiration for Adela's own aggression: "Her mind delighted in the thought of the coming attack on outrageous evil: as medieval knights thought before action on their 'lady's' lips, so she thought on Psyche's purple arms" (S, **p. 127**, Volume IV, XX, 22-23). Lisa Tickner notes that: "the Victorian and Edwardian public expected to see the virtues and vice of femininity *written on the body*", interpreting character through "physiognomy, gesture and pose".[80] The imposed marks on suffragette bodies form a different kind of writing, becoming emblematic of courage and truth, as evocative and provocative as the clothes they wore and the banners they carried. These marks are also the visual evidence of male brutality, the "writing on the body" by a hypocritical society that refused to grant women the vote on the basis of their weakness, but was prepared to inflict physical violence in public spaces and in prisons on these same "fragile" beings. Adela's first glimpse of Psyche's bruised body comes as a revelation and as an incitement to war: "It had the tremendous effect on Adela that trifles sometimes have on sane, well-balanced minds. It acted on her nature chemically, [she] changing the substance though not the method. And it added to her qualities an avid, implacable appetite for just revenge that made her

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[79]Lyons, p. 109.

[80]Tickner, p. 152. The most obvious "mark" on the body to reveal "vice" is pregnancy. Adela escapes this imprint of "vice" after her encounter with Ashcroft: "I know I'm free from detection" (S, **p. 10**, Book 1, V, 22).

henceforth a terrible foe to evil" (S, **p. 97**, Volume III, XVI? 54). Adela's body is marked too. During the attack on the car by a group of Liberal Stewards, when Psyche is nearly strangled and Maude Brooke is kicked in the shins and stomach, Adela is struck in the chest. The bruising Adela sustains, which is described in rather Gothic terms, takes on even greater symbolic significance than Psyche's battered body. Not only is the bruising a consequence of physical, even sexual assault, it is also an assault on the child-bearing capacity of the suffragettes, unsexing and oversexing them simultaneously. The vulnerability of suffragettes to sexual attack was one of the dangers of their campaign which "breached the social distance between men and women".[81] The bruised breast acquires a personal significance for Adela, who comes to associate it with her passion for Langlad and her refusal to act on that passion: "With the curious diffused imagination of a sick person she grew to associate this grief with the bruise on her breasts" (S, **p. 126**, Volume IV, XX, 21). The bruise is a mark of sexual insult and a mark of sexual denial.[82]

The eroticism implicit in Adela's contemplation of Psyche's bruised body and the bruises on her own body, surfaces briefly in a highly charged scene. Describing the three-day vigil of Pysche, Adela and Maude Brooke in the attic, the young Rebecca touches on the relations between Adela and Psyche whose underlying homoerotic tensions are juxtaposed with heterosexual yearnings:

> She (Adela) often woke during these two long nights, moaning for Langlad, and found Psyche crying through the sound sleep of one habitually starved of rest; not from cowardice but from sheer physical pain. So they would snuggle in each others arms and lie cuddling [together] innocently till some concussion of their tender bodies sent them shuddering apart. In the light of day their relations were less openly intimate. The only [Psyche] time Psyche broke out into any active evidence of her pure passions was when Adela showed her the final clause of her will - 'I bequeath the residue of my estate

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[81]Vicinus, p. 263. There are numerous incidences of violent sexual assault reported in *Votes for Women*.

[82]West's attempt to write about heightened and distorted mental states in this novel anticipates her interest in shell shock and amnesia in *The Return of the Soldier*.

> to Mrs Mona Charteris, absolutely and without restriction, to be used by her as she thinks [by her] best for the amelioration of the condition of women.'
> Psyche's scarlet lips smiled dreamily, her brilliant eyes sought the distant sky; she exclaimed with amorous intensity -
> 'I *love* women! Don't you?'
> For a second Adela experienced the shame that the beloved suffer (sic) at the white fingers of origin. (S, **p. 126**,Volume IV, XX, 21-22)

In this passage, West ventures where few suffragette writers dared to go, although she also retreats in the end, through Adela's rather obscure response to Psyche's declaration. But this moment of erotic intensity reveals a reaching for psychological realism from a young writer who not only read *Votes for Women*, but who was also trying to read the experiences of the suffragettes she knew. The latent homoerotic nuances which briefly surface here, anticipate the more submerged eroticism of the revitalising and regenerative woman, present in much of West's early writing.[83]

Suffrage and Suffragettes

West's radical attempt to explore both male and female sexuality, the taboo topic (at the time) of female homoeroticism,[84] the power of desire, especially repressed desire, and to find a language through which to represent these taboo subjects, extends the text well beyond many of her "New Woman" mentors, and especially beyond the newly emergent genre of the suffrage novel. As Glenda Norquay points out in her discussion of suffrage novels:

> within the complex redefinitions of 'woman' taking place within these texts, attention must also be given to areas of silence: to that which is unrepresented. Questions of free love and female sexuality, strongly emerging themes in fiction of the 1890s, are largely absent. Passion, when it occurs, is presented as a reward for the woman who has achieved fulfilment within an approved context - either found in the cause itself or through

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[83]Interestingly, in the Brian Harrison interview about the suffragette movement, West alludes to a "Small Lesbian relationship [which] became known to her later, which was influential: Vera - and the Honourable Mrs Scarlett" ("Interview with Dame Rebecca West", 15 August 1974). It is possible to speculate that she drew on her knowlege of this friendship for her portrayal of the intense friendships in her novel.

[84]See Sally Ledger's chapter on "The New Woman and Emergent Lesbian Identity" in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the 'fin de siècle.*

> marriage. Expressions of emotional fervour directed towards other women, as striking instances in *Suffragette Sally* and *The Call* show, were represented in terms which emphasise their spiritual and political dimensions and play down the personal.[85]

Involved in the battle to redefine "woman", suffragist writers appropriated some features of the "New Woman", and eschewed others, notably explicitness about sexual matters. Numerous critics have illustrated the contradictions inherent in many of these novelists' attempts at redefining women, especially in their re-appropriation of traditional concepts. The redefinition of women was, however, only part of the suffragist writer's purpose. The suffragist novel was also a deliberate piece of propaganda, written either to persuade potential feminists to become involved or to encourage those who already belonged to the movement. Miller and Norquay have highlighted a number of important features characteristic of the suffragist novel - the use of dialogue in order to inform or persuade, the mixture of narrative form where the tropes of popular fiction (romance and adventure) are blended with a realism reminiscent of journalistic texts,[86] and the attempt to avoid "the tyranny of the romance plot" where "suffrage writers substituted a type of quest narrative, and romantic desire was either omitted entirely or made subordinate to the desire to win the vote".[87] Keating notes that: "the suffragette movement had surprisingly little impact on fiction. The militant suffragette is to be found frequently in popular fiction of the day, but rarely as more than social detail".[88] Whilst more recent feminist critics would disagree on the limited impact of suffrage fiction, they too have sought answers for the relative scarcity of this kind of novel. There are a variety of reasons; the political nature of suffrage fiction; the fact that "novelists who were

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[85]Norquay, p. 12.

[86]Norquay, pp. 30-3.

[87]Miller, p. 161. West's employment of a romance plot in her novel is awkward and self-conscious. The self-reflexive allusions to stories and heroines in the scene where Robert Langlad proposes to Adela, highlights West's uneasy appropriation of this genre: "'Isn't there a stream anywhere?' asked Adela. 'There always is in story woods" (S, **p. 111**, Volume III, XVIII, 77) At the same time, Adela's refusal of both her suitors deviates in important ways from the conventional resolutions common in suffrage novels.

[88]Keating, p. 207.

suffragettes ... were too involved in the numerous activities of the movement to have either the time or the inclination to write fiction" and the sense that "to fictionalize the events of this important movement might trivialize them".[89]

"The Sentinel" shares many of the features deemed to be characteristic of the suffragist novel, although how many of these novels West could have read before writing her own, depends on when she began the project. If she started her novel in 1909/1910, West had relatively few examples to draw on. The most important novel to be published before this date was Elizabeth Robins' *The Convert* in 1907.[90] There can be little doubt that the young Rebecca had read this novel and, with her avid interest in drama, she had probably read the earlier dramatic version, *Votes For Women* (1907), if she had not seen it.[91] Certain events befalling Adela Furnival may well be borrowed from Robins's novel: both heroines inherit a large sum of money, for example, and both are seduced by older men. It is revealed towards the end of *The Convert* that Vida Levering, the main protagonist of the novel, had an abortion when she was young, following the refusal of her lover to marry her. Other novels West might have read before embarking on her own project were *Outlawed* by Charlotte Despard and Mabel Collins (1908), Evelyn Sharp's *Rebel Women* (1910) and Annie S. Swan, *Margaret Holroyd or The Pioneers* (1910). If West was still writing "The Sentinel" during 1911, the publication of two novels, Constance Maud's *No Surrender* (1911) and

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[89]Miller, p. 129.

[90]There are numerous essays which discuss this novel and other suffragist works. See Miller and Norquay and also: Shirley Peterson, "The Emancipation of the Heroine: The Suffragist in the British Novel 1907-1922", (PhD Dissertation, University of Delaware, 1990). Jane Marcus, "The Divine Rage to Be Didactic", introduction to a reprint of *The Convert* (New York: Feminist, 1980). Wendy Mulford, "Socialist-Feminist Criticism: A Case Study, Women's Suffrage and Literature 1906-1914" in Peter Widdowson, ed. *Rereading English* (London: Methuen, 1992).

[91] It may well be coincidence, but it is interesting to note that "the nail and chain makers of Cradley Heath" who are mentioned towards the end of *The Convert,* are referred to in West's very first letter published in *The Scotsman* in 1907 (Glendinning, p. 30).

especially Gertrude Colemore's *Suffragette Sally* (1911)[92] might have had some impact. The publication of these novels might, alternatively, have been part of the reason why West abandoned her own fictional version of militant feminism.

Like other suffragist novels, "The Sentinel" is a *roman à clef*, whose characters are quite obviously based on the heroines of the suffragette movement and the main political figures opposing the vote. The indomitable Pankhurst family appear in the personages of Mrs Charteris (Emmeline Pankhurst), Britomart [93] (Christabel Pankhurst) and Psyche (a mixture of Mary Gawthorpe and Christabel perhaps). Although the youngest Pankhurst sister, Adela, is absent in the fictional family as mentioned earlier, Adela Furnival seems to be named after her and stand in her place. Mary Gerald is based on Mary Gawthorpe. She is described early on in "The Sentinel" as "a little woman, gay with red cheeks and dancing hazel eyes" (S, **p. 13**, Book II, I, 25) and brown hair. A little later she is referred to as "the bright little elfin thing small and gay as some vivacious insect" (S, **p. 13**, Book II, I, 26). The young Rebecca's friendship with several of her suffragette heroines during her own involvement in suffrage campaigning, infuses her admiring portraits with some realism. In a letter to Lettie in 1908, she describes Miss Gawthorpe's disturbing influence on Winston Churchill: "She is a very witty speaker and really rather logical in spite of her wild tendency to say the most unexpected thing possible. Her looks carry her every where - she has such pretty brown hair and blue eyes and a marvellously perfect mouth" (AM Collection). In another letter to Lettie she refers to a meeting at Harrogate where "both Christabel and Lovey

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[92]For useful critical discussions of this novel, see Miller and Shirley Peterson's "The Politics of a Moral Crusade: Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally*" in *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers* 1889-1939, eds. Angela Ingram and Daphne Patal, (Chapel Hill & London: U. of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 101-117. There is a character named Cyril Race in Colmore's novel and a Matthew Race in West's, although there are few similarities between the two characters.

[93]The name of Edmund Spenser's chaste, female knight in *The Faerie Queen*, and a popular symbolic figure for the suffragettes (See Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 266). The image of the chaste female knight was emblematised most vividly by Joan of Arc, who became an icon of the movement. For more information on her importance, see Vicinus and Tickner.

Mary (Mary Gawthorpe) were at their very best" (AM Collection, n.d.). Leslie Macarthur, the suffragette Adela meets in prison, seems to be based on Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. Leslie Macarthur's husband, her motor car and chauffeur, and her country home in Surrey are details which coincide closely with the real Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, although West endows the fictional version with children and a passion for motherhood.[94] These are some of the main characters in the novel amongst many, who are apparently based upon actual people involved in the suffragette movement and in various other political groups.

Like *The Convert* and *Suffragette Sally*, "The Sentinel" can be placed in the tradition of the realist novel, where realism verges on the documentary. This "hybridity of form" is, Norquay notes, "a characteristic of Edwardian fiction attributed to the influences of journalism and social investigation".[95] These influences which are evident through the layering of reported events and fiction in "The Sentinel", are an important feature of suffragist fiction, where fact and fiction are blended into an imaginative and propagandistic version of the battle for women's rights. As Jane Eldridge Miller points out: "These novels are propaganda, in that they strive to counteract negative press coverage and public antipathy; but they also function as investigative journalism, for they expose, in documentary detail, the horrors of imprisonment and forcible feeding".[96] West emulates earlier suffragist novels and their documentary style, drawing firstly on her own experiences of involvement in the cause. Selling *Votes for Women* as a young teenager in Edinburgh[97] (an experience described most

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[94]The details about Leslie Macarthur/Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence are quite specific, especially the descriptions based on Pethick-Lawrence's country house, Holmwood in Surrey. It is possible that some of these details emerged in articles in *Votes for Women*, written by suffragettes who had stayed there to recuperate from prison experiences. It is not clear whether the young Rebecca actually met Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, but her descriptions coincide interestingly with the much later ones given by Mary Gawthorpe in *Uphill to Holloway*. See also Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence's *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938).

[95]Norquay, p. 30.

[96]Miller, p. 144.

[97]She was referred to by name quite regularly in *Votes for Women*. The June 25 1909 edition specifically mentioned that there has been an increase of sales of *Votes for Women* due to the efforts of Miss Fairfield (that is, Cissy) and others (p. 855).

vividly in *The Judge*) and attending various suffrage meetings, West knew the exposure and danger to which suffragettes were subjected. She reported to Lettie the violent scenes she had witnessed at a Leith Gaiety meeting, where a suffragette, Miss Hudson, was beaten and struck again and again in the face by police. She notes at the end of the letter that "Both Miss Hudson and Nurse Elsie are in bed as a consequence of Saturday. Miss Hudson's arms are black with bruises from the elbow to the shoulder" (AM Collection, 5 December 1909). Although she witnessed these clashes and skirmishes, "[s]he never came into conflict with the law herself, though once, outside the House of Commons in London, she had to wriggle out of her coat, leaving it in the hands of two policemen, and escaped by crawling away through the crowd".[98] These first-hand experiences, the accounts of her sisters and the more violent incidents and stories of imprisonment and forced feeding, drawn from the daily papers and most specifically from *Votes for Women* (and perhaps from the personal testaments of the suffragettes she knew), provided plenty of material for her novel. Adela's first experience of a demonstration and violence, followed by imprisonment, occurs soon after she joins the movement. The attempt to reach the Houses of Parliament by the suffragettes is thwarted by the police. Having been viciously assaulted by a young man, Adela is finally arrested as she attempts to escape through a gap in the cordon of mounted police. In court, she is falsely accused of knocking a policeman's cap off, seizing the bridle and trying to lead away the horse. She is given an excessively long prison sentence and soon finds herself in Holloway prison , "a House of Madness" where "round and round the asphalt yard, deformed by the [blind] brutal foolery of the State, trotted the Sisters of Liberty" (S, **p. 27**, Book II, IV, 55). The incident of "rushing" the House in the face of mounted police could be based on any one of many, for example, the 1907 march from Caxton Hall to

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[98]Glendinning, p. 31.

Parliament.[99] Most likely however, the incident was based on a similar deputation which took place in June 1909, where mounted police were in evidence and numerous suffragettes were arrested. This is the date referred to in a most interesting suffragette narrative published in a pamphlet in 1910: "Pages from the Diary of a Militant Suffragette".[100] The similarities between the events recorded in this diary and those in "The Sentinel" seem to be more than coincidental. This is one of the many places in the novel where West has incorporated articles or "documentary" accounts almost wholesale, mingling them with her own narrative in an interpretative overlay, and thus creating a collage of journalism and fiction.[101] There are several other important scenes of violence in the narrative which follow this pattern, for example, the attack on a car in which Adela, Psyche and other suffragettes are travelling to a meeting in Yorkshire, by Liberal Party stewards. Having survived this brutality, the three suffragettes prepare to lie in wait for three days in an attic opposite Smithburn Town Hall, in order to disrupt the meeting held by the President of the Board of Trade. They launch an extraordinary assault on the town hall, using iron-bolts attached to rope: "In a few minutes the glass roofs immediately in front of them which they knew to be over the platform, looked as if they had been shelled" (S, **p. 130**, Volume IV, XX, 28). This incident is an imaginative amalgamation of two or more actual incidents. The suffragette attack on a hall in Birmingham in September 1909, where the Prime Minister was due to speak, is one such example.[102] Following the attack, the three suffragettes are arrested, and solitary confinement, hunger-striking and forcible feeding follow.

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[99]See Rosen, p. 79.

[100]Katharine Roberts, Letchworth and London: Garden City Press Ltd, in *The Militants: Suffragette Activism*, ed. Dr Marie Mulvey Roberts and Professor Tamue Mizula, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 7-144.

[101]For discussions of the documentative power of suffrage narratives, especially the novels of Elizabeth Robins, see Wim Neetens' chapter on "Feminist Positions: Sarah Grand and Elizabeth Robins" in *Writing and Democracy: Literature, Politics and Culture in Transition* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 106-127 and Shirly Peterson's "The Politics of Moral Crusade: Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally,* pp. 101-117.

[102]For more details on suffragette violence, see Andrew Rosen, Antonia Raeburn, Jane Marcus and Sylvia Pankhurst.

Whilst each of these incidents vividly illustrate the grit and "pluck"[103] of the suffragettes in a fashion typical of the genre, the young Rebecca extends these depictions in a variety of ways. Contrary to the conventions of much suffragette writing which "missed opportunities in not writing about violence",[104] West describes violent clashes between the suffragettes and their enemies with great vividness, and she does not neglect to describe the fact that the women fought back. This is especially highlighted when Adela and colleagues are attacked in their car:

> The first thing that Adela clearly realised was a blow in the stomach. A man was standing in the car beside her, kicking Maude Brooke's shins and pummelling her in the stomach. She looked at him, remembered Psyche's empurpled arms and smiled. With quiet skill her fist found him under the jaw. She was pleased and surprised to see him hurtle from the car on the [wood] road and fall howling in the dust. But the whole car seemed swarming with men. One was hammering Maude Brooke on the temples: she lay white and still, her mouth open... Psyche's coat had been torn off....She was being strangled: a man [stood] was standing in front of her winding her scarf round and round the tender little throat. With a shout of wrath Adela turned on her assailant and flung him back. In a second he was on her again, biting her in the soft part of the arm, below the elbow. Sick with loathing and mad with pain, she had to tear his teeth apart till her fingers were dripping with his slaver. As soon as she was free she snatched off her scarf and flung it round his throat, twisting it tighter and tighter till he reeled backwards ... Every inch of her body, her back, her thighs, her arms, was steeped in agony. With her relief Senhouse freed himself and left her untroubled by these men to rescue Psyche. The girl's face was purplish like her arms: a white rose was gathered on her lips. The man was still twisting the scarf. (S, **p. 119**, Volume IV, XIX, 9-10)

This brutal and shocking attack, in which Psyche is almost strangled and Maude and Adela suffer severe injuries, appears to be based very closely on an event reported in *Votes For Women.*[105] Here it was reported that Miss Adela Pankhurst and several other suffragettes were attacked by a crowd of Liberal stewards: "Miss Adela Pankhurst was nearly pulled out

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[103]The concept of "pluck" is frequently used in suffragist fiction, in a strategic appropriation of male militant rhetoric. See Norquay, p. 28. "Pluck" was also associated with schoolgirl narratives of the period.

[104]Miller, p. 159.

[105]"Savage Attack by Liberal Stewards", *Votes for Women* (October 22, 1909, p. 54)

of the car, and the clothes of other women were torn...The women were struck and had sods thrown at them, and they had literally to fight for their lives". What is important about West's imaginative rendition of the report in *Votes for Women,* is the way in which she not only details the violence inflicted on the women, but also the aggressive passion of Adela in defending herself and the others.[106] Her 'unladylike' behaviour in punching and trying to strangle one of the men, and the grotesque images of the wounded body, the "white rose" of saliva gathering at the half-strangled Psyche's lips for example, are details which rarely surface in other pro-suffrage novels. Such a portrayal is in danger of undermining the carefully cultivated image of 'womanliness' which the WSPU tried to project alongside its militancy. It would also be more than discouraging for potential recruits. The shock of the physical, of the blows on the female body, is typical of the honesty and graphic qualities the young Rebecca attempts to achieve in this early novel. Another example of this method is her description of the incarceration of the suffragettes in their attic. On the morning of the attack, Adela is inflicted with a fear-induced nausea:

> But her body revolted at the prospect of the tremendous excitement and - afterwards! The hunger strike and forcible feeding - these were terrors new not only to herself but to her generation. There was a heavy lump about her heart. She had difficulty in breathing. Her skin was pasty and black round the eyes, and gave off a greasy moisture. On rising to her feet she was disturbed by the premonitory symptoms of nausea. She didn't want to be sick. It would have been so disgusting in these cramped quarters. The decencies had already been violated over and over again. (S, **p. 127**, Volume IV, XX, 23)

West's Zolaesque realism disintegrates the emblematic representation of the suffragette with all its Victorian delicacy about 'femininity', and gestures towards a greater realism by not only acknowledging fear, but a fear imaged through the body's reaction to it. A similar gory

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[106]West refers to this incident a few years later in one of many articles she published on the suffragettes. See "An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex-Antagonism" in *The Clarion*, 27 September 1912, *YRB*, p. 99.

realism is employed in her depictions of Adela's hunger-strike and forcible feeding.

> The doctor then proceeded to force into her mouth and down her throat a large india rubber tube. She felt as if he was killing her. The tube seemed to go down for ever. She could not breathe. It irritated her throat and lacerated the mucous membrane. The drums of her ears seemed to be bursting, the top of her head coming off. Beyond the breastbone she could not feel it till it began to press down her stomach. There it stopped. Then the doctor raised the funnel at the end of the tube and poured in a tumblerful of milk. Again she choked. With her set and glassy eyes she saw her body begin to writhe and resist: of itself it began to twist from side to side about the transfixing tube and try to expel it. Almost immediately she [vomited] became violently sick. But the doctor poured in three more tumbler fuls (sic) till, alarmed by an excessive vomiting, he withdrew the tube. She felt as if the upper part of her chest and the back of her throat were being dragged out with it. Her eyes followed it fascinated - small particles of blood and phlegm still adhered to it. (S, **p. 137-138**, Volume IV, XXII?, 44)

Again, for the details of the ordeal, West borrows from reports by those who had been through the experience. The description bears a particular resemblance to a famous report by Mary Leigh to her soliciter, published in *Votes for Women* in 1909:

> The sensation is most painful - the drums of the ear seem to be bursting, a horrible pain in the throat and the breast. The tube is pushed down 20 inches ... When the glass junction shows the fluid has gone down, a signal is given, a basin of warm water is put under my chin and the other doctor with- draws the tube and plunges the end into the water.[107]

While West does not explore the analogy, many suffragettes (although few novelists) made between forcible feeding and rape,[108] the emphasis on the physical horror of the ordeal heightens the brutality of the men and women inflicting this on the persecuted suffragette. West also considers the broader implications of forced feeding:

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[107]Reprinted in *The Militants: Suffragette Activism*, pp. 1-6. See Jane Eldridge Miller's discussion of the representation of forcible feeding in Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally*. Stating that Colemore "neutralizes any sexual tension, and precludes the expression of personal response", she suggests that this is a typical feature of suffrage fiction: "Thus there are no sympathetic or even objective fictional representations of the most controversial, sensational and violent stage of the suffrage movement" (p. 154). In the light of this, West's attempt to dramatize a personal response (albeit an indirect one) to suffragette experiences through Adela Furnival, is all the more remarkable.

[108]West did make the analogy in an article on Emily Davison for *The Clarion,* 20 June 1913. Discussing forcible feeding, she declares: "But today Jack the Ripper works free-handed from the honourable places of government" (*YRB*, p. 183). See also Djuna Barnes, American journalist and writer, who wrote an article on "How It Feels to be Forcibly Fed", *New York World Magazine* 6 September 1914, p. 5, 7.

> In the month that lay between Adela and Smithburn, there was discovered that supreme [invention] manifestation of the heroines of liberty seeking humanity, the hunger-strike. The events that had precipitated it were many. There was for one, the fact that a man, condemned for an offence far more illegal than the women's, had been accorded first division treatment for his political motive, a motive much less political than theirs. But the principal reason was the public was getting used to women suffering in prison as they [were used] had become used to women suffering outside prison...The tactlessly misused force which was alienating our colonies and other nations found its latest expression in the exercise of stomach pumping. Originally a life-saving device of the medical profession it was converted by violent methods, physical insults, lack of skill and attention, [it became] into a hellish torture (S, **p. 116**, Volume IV, XIX, 5).

Suffragette action is portrayed as a moral act in the name of humanity and as a necessary response to the shocking demonstration of society's treatment of women. Government action is shown to have moral and political resonances, in which the treatment of women is emblematic of international as well as national policies. In tune with much feminist thinking of the time, West insists on the integral relations between the so called public and private spheres of society. The comparison of the treatment of women with that of those who have been colonised, in a context where militancy is deemed to be a moral act, carries interesting implications for Britain's colonies.[109] Despite an element of naïvety in her portrayal of militant intervention and her tendency towards the melodramatic, West's appropriation of reportage and her insistence on portraying the suffragettes as sometimes grotesquely physical, both serves to enrich her narrative and shock her potential readers. Like Adela who questions Rosie Essletree, imprisoned for child murder, about her motives and feelings because of her own "passionate curiosity [about] of the psychology of the situation" (S, **p. 34**, Volume II, V, 4), West wishes to go beyond the journalistic facts in order to uncover the

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[109]See Gilbert and Gubar's "Home Rule: The Colonies of the New Woman" in *No Man's Land,* Vol. 2, pp. 47-82. There is more to be said about the ways in which West treats notions of Empire, the state, and also "the race" itself in this novel. Like many feminist thinkers and writers of the day, her liberal discourse is threaded with less liberal discourses, as she accepts many of the contemporary debates and beliefs about motherhood and maintaining high standards of the race for country and Empire. Idealising motherhood was one way in which feminists at this time could argue for women's rights.

psychology both of the suffragettes, and also of a society which could licence such cruelty.

Explicitness about violence and the attempt to represent and express male and female sexual desire, are not the only areas in which West's narrative spills over boundaries that most other suffragist writers retained. Norquay outlines other limitations inherent in most suffragist narratives:

> Explorations of motherhood and childrearing, a significant element of many women's experience and a genuine constraint for women without child-care facilities who wanted to campaign, were likewise scarcely evident in suffrage literature. Class differences, although signalled as an issue in some of the pro-suffrage literature, were rarely explored with any complexity.[110]

In "The Sentinel", West also tries to address precisely these issues with varying degrees of insight and success. The issues of female violence and militancy, of sexuality, motherhood and marriage, and of class differences *are* raised, in a display of contemporary views on the subject and also of the developing, and sometimes contradictory views of the young writer herself.

Different classes, different lives

The problem of class difference *is* dealt with in this novel, although rather briefly.[111] As a member of the middle class with family connections in industry and manufacturing, Adela is a conventional heroine for the suffragette novel, although her status as an orphan makes it more difficult to fix her in any particular class. Her close connections with industry allow for some comment on the ill-treatment of the working classes, particularly women workers.[112] Her initial impulse to join the militant feminist movement arises out of her

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[110]Norquay, pp. 12-13.

[111]West's sensitivity to class differences within a feminist context emerges most strikingly in her early journalism and in the *Adela* fragment, discussed in Chapter Two.

[112]West takes up the cause of women workers again in many of her articles in the socialist paper, *The Clarion*. See Jane Marcus's *The Young Rebecca*, pp. 89-238.

indignation at sweated labour and such poor remuneration that prostitution is a necessity:

> In the afternoon I saw a lace pelisse for sale, a very pretty and cheap little garment. I happened to know its history. It was made by a girl who four years ago was still basking in the beautiful influences of the Poor Children's Club. She is now sixteen and a prostitute. She is earning five shillings a week in a cheap lace factory, [managed] owned, by the way, [of] by a relative of mine, in which three out of every five girls are forced onto the streets. The pelisse was sold across a counter of a big drapery store, owned by another relative of mine, a gentleman who is Parliamentary candidate for Central Cecilbourne by a girl who 'lived in' and received as salary [four shill] a few pence a week and the use of a latchkey. The latchkey is [was] always used: [it must be] (S, **p. 14**, Book II, I, 28-29).[113]

Although these claims and accusations are not explored in any depth, West makes clear the initial close connections between working-class concerns and feminism. This theme of the exploited woman and the exploited classes is raised again when Adela meets Rosie Essletree during her first imprisonment. This innocent-looking and pathetic young woman who has been abandoned by her lover and left destitute, offers another opportunity for a critique of society. Rosie is portrayed as a victim of the patriarchal State, where poor working wages as a laundry worker keep her impoverished and vulnerable. This vulnerabilty is symbolised by her pregnancy, abandonment and infanticide. Rosie's plight provokes outspoken criticism of a system which victimises the underdog and motivates Adela in her feminist cause.

> Now she knew that she could not leave the battlefield. In the midst of peace [she could] her heart would be rent by the thought of that blind brazen engine of the State throwing out its hammers and its cranes to destroy, one way or another, Rosie Essletree. It must be regulated. She must fight her way till the power of regulation was gained. (S, **p. 35**, Volume II, V, 5-6)[114]

Adela's encounter with Agnes Kelly, newly released from prison having been convicted for theft, provokes a different experience. Offering her employment as a parlourmaid, Adela

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[113]This passage is strikingly reminiscent of the inner plot of E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (first published in 1910), which West may well have read while working on her own novel. While allusions to latchkeys in Forster's novels connote independence and freedom for women, West associates the latchkey with exploitation and perhaps prostitution.

[114]The authoritative and somewhat melodramatic tone of this passage is characteristic of West's writing in this novel, when commenting on larger political issues.

visits Agnes's home in Soho.[115] She is appalled by the poverty of the family and their cramped living conditions, but finds herself envying their self-containment and feels her exclusion not only on a personal level, but on a class level too: "[Although] Because of a thousand years of different traditions and opportunities she was debarred from even frank communication with those whom the divine, the irrational love for humanity impelled her to serve" (S, **p. 41**, Volume II, VI, 18). West also tries to engage with class prejudice in her portrayal of Agnes's family, describing Adela's shame at "how she and the Washed classes looked on this; how the domestic life of these sickly-circumstanced folk seemed to them unplanned, unpassionate procreation like the teemings of the mud-layer of a pond bottom" (S, **p. 40**, Volume II, VI, 16). At the same time, the narrative voices the author's own class assumptions and inadequate understanding, revealed, for example, through Adela's naïve response to the family's poverty: "are you quite satisfied with your rooms?" (S, **p. 41**, Volume II, VI, 17).

Interestingly, Agnes does not remain very long in Adela's service, since she finds her vocation, most startlingly, as an entertainer in the London music halls. Agnes Kelly achieves her fame by becoming a male impersonater.[116] This shift in occupation alters the relationship between Adela and Agnes, where "None of the accepted phrases interchangeable between mistress and maid met the occasion. Adela beamed congratulation and Agnes responded with silent smiles" (S, **p. 145**, Volume IV, XXII, 55). Whilst the convention in suffragist novels which include a romance plot, is to match the suffragette with a man from her own class, West creates the possibility for romance between Adela and a former boilermaker.

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[115]Agnes's background, like some of Adela's relatives, also appears to be Jewish.

[116]See J. S. Bratton, "Beating the Bounds: Gender Play and Role Reversal in the Edwardian Music Hall" in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, eds., Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 86-110. Her new profession is not the only example of transvestism in the novel. In order to escape capture before a planned attack on a liberal meeting in Smithburn, Adela dresses as a chauffeur, experiencing her male attire as both liberating and shameful.

Robert Langlad is a self-educated man who can recommend Nietzsche to Adela, but he suspects that her rejection of him results from his own coarse habits and northern accent. The novel breaks off before the tension of this romance can be explored. Although the issue of class differences and its consequences both for the treatment of women and for feminist responses is alluded to rather than explored in depth, West tries to maintain an awareness of these connections, in the spirit of her own early political and feminist ideals.

Ideal and Deplorable Mothers

Motherhood and child-rearing, a feature relegated firmly to the private sphere in most types of narrative, including suffragette stories,[117] is dealt with in some detail in this novel. Motherhood was of course central to the debate about redefining the nature of 'woman'; it was "a site of contradiction for women. It was the principle element in the definition and regulation of female sexuality and at the same time a source of feminine power".[118] This preoccupation would have been surprising in a young writer who had not yet embarked on motherhood herself, had it not been at the heart not only of feminist debate at the time, but of a broader political debate too. As Anna Davin points out: "Around the beginning of this century infant life and child health took on a new importance in public discussion, reinforced by emphasis on the value of a healthy and numerous population as a national resource"[119] The ideology of motherhood was taken up by various sectors of society, including feminists, eugenicists, and pressure groups such as the Fabians. In fact, the preoccupations of the Fabians, who proposed the 'Endowment of Motherhood' in order to demand "financial recognition by the state that mother's work rearing children contributed to the good of

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[117]Norquay, p. 12.
[118]Tickner, p. 217.
[119]Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood" in *History Workshop*, 4-5 (Spring 1978), p. 9. H.G. Wells was involved in promoting the idea of the "Endowment of Motherhood".

society", a proposal that was "effectively an economic version of the eugenicists' elevation of motherhood", provides an important context for this novel.[120] As a new member of the Fabian Society, West was no doubt eager to explore some of its latest theories. In a variety of scenes, which could almost be described as set pieces, West sets up a series of issues and debates around the vexed question of motherhood. Rosie Essletree, described as "an earthly madonna" (S, **p. 31**, Book II, V, 64), is the first "mother" Adela meets. Her plight highlights the hypocrisy of a system that elevates the status of motherhood on the one hand, but punishes those who do not conform to its definitions. Significantly, Adela sees herself as a surrogate mother for Rosie and women like her, expanding the definition of motherhood, while accepting its traditional idealization:

> The memory of the girl thrilled through her like a trumpet-call. [...] Adela had the guilty smart of an evaded responsibility for her. When Rosie's tear-drenched face nozzled (sic) into her bosom she had made Adela her mother. Now that the child was fast behind the prison walls, it was Adela's plain duty to seek out by far-reaching indirect work Rosie's sisters, whom direct search could not find nor help. Another duty, based on every tradition and custom, had made her relinquish that. Yet she felt mean and cowardly - an unnatural mother. In a fever of discomfort she rose to her feet. (S, **p. 81-82**, Volume III, XIII, 16)

In contrast to the "earthly madonna"[121] who has murdered her baby, West presents two different versions of mothering by comparing her cousin Marie with the suffragette Leslie Macarthur. Leslie, a vibrant and brave woman who is willing to go to prison for the cause, is also passionate about her children and their upbringing. In conversation with an aristocratic neighbour, Leslie declares: "'Oh, I've peculiar ideas about motherhood' ... 'I don't want my children to thank me for never having done anything particular, and hence

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[120]Davin, p. 23.

[121]The use of religious language in relation to motherhood is typical not only of "The Sentinel" but of comparable depictions of women in suffrage fiction and journalism. Later in the novel, motherhood is referred to as a form of crucifixion, an image consistent with associations between feminism and martyrdom. See Gilbert and Gubar's discussion of the use of religious rhetoric as a way of showing the women's movement as a religious development ("Home Rule", pp. 68-69).

establishing myself as a shining light of Surrey Society. I have wild notions that nobility of action may be inherited. So I do my best!'" (S, **p. 45**, Volume II, VII, 26). Leslie's son is referred to as the voter and the twin daughters as suffragettes. A great deal of attention is paid to the vibrancy and energy of these children, making a clear contrast with Marie Hereford's larger but more sickly brood, also depicted in some detail. Compared with Leslie, Marie is an unthinking producer of progeny whose health becomes more delicate, the more children she has: "Indeed, Marie was the Ideal Woman of the AntiSuffragist [which] for she had always on her lap new babies and old stockings" (S, **p. 71**, Volume II, XII, 78). Indebted to eugenicist and imperialist discourses, West's description of Marie's benign but mindless childbearing is depicted as a threat to the state:

> The parenthood of these two people was merely the chance result of an animal function. Yet one of the things she had promised herself when she returned to Cecilbourne had been the enjoyment of this simple, State-blind domestic life. But this did not seem like Motherhood at all. Motherhood meant patience, courage, self-discipline, nobility. She [learn] had learnt that many times of late. The memory came to her of Leslie Macarthur whispering with grave resolution over the pillows of her sleeping children: - 'I must give my babies a good mother! Oh, my God. I must be good.' ... Certainly much evil is wrought today by the idiotic expectation of fine sons from weak, luxurious women. Motherhood as a skilled industry has not yet been discovered. (S, **p. 76**, Volume III, XII, 5)[122]

As well as utilising the device of set pieces comparing 'good' and 'inadequate' methods of mothering, West extends the definition of motherhood to the celibate and childless leaders of the suffragette movement, whose nurturing of the movement for the liberation of women is seen to be as creative and productive as child-rearing itself. "In spite of this deprivation of motherhood Mary Gerald and Psyche Charteris were not sterile. By their labours the superb essence of their souls was reproduced infinitely on the earth. By their faith and nobility they bred faith and nobility. Their brilliant brains stimulated brilliance in other

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[122]This statement is a direct echo of Fabian ideals. West addresses the issue of motherhood regularly in her early journalism; see, for example, Marcus's *The Young Rebecca*.

brains which had been content with sloth" (S, **p. 136-137**, Volume IV, XXI, 38).[123] Mary Gerald and Psyche Charteris become universal mothers of an enobled people, an image which is consistent with much feminist doctrine of the time. As Vicinus points out, the "WSPU and many of the other suffrage organizations tried to forge a new spirituality, based upon women's traditional idealism and self-sacrifice but intended to reach out and transform not only the position of women in society, but that very society itself".[124]

While it is at first surprising to find the young Rebecca West so absorbed in issues of motherhood in this early novel, the preoccupation is a theoretical one, idealised and criticised by turns. It is the preoccupation of an avid reader, who has drawn into her text the major debates concerning women of the time. By fictionalising these debates, the young writer vividly displays both an interrogation and an acceptance of some of the salient ideologies of motherhood. The issues of motherhood, propounded here in rather stark, almost documentary terms, remained at the forefront of much of West's writing, particularly after the birth of her own illegitimate son. What is begun in "The Sentinel" is not so much ended in *The Judge*, but obsessively rewritten.

The Problem with Endings

Endings were "a particular problem for fiction written before the vote was gained; no clear political resolution could be offered and the degree of commitment to the cause as a subject was often revealed by the kind of ending adopted".[125] West's sister's (Winifred Fairfield) view was that the novel could never have been completed because it was "as long as life itself", and this might provide an apt comment on much suffrage writing of the period,

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[123]The idealistic celebration of the suffragettes as mothers of humanity ends abruptly here, as the next three pages of the manuscript are unfortunately missing.

[124]Vicinus, p. 252.

[125]Norquay, p. 29.

extracted as it was directly from contemporary events which were still in the process of unravelling. The difficulty of finding an ending for "The Sentinel" may well have been one of West's reasons for abandoning it. There are a number of other possible reasons, too - a lack of time, a loss of interest, or the publication of other novels which dealt with similar issues. But the most important reason may have been a dissatisfaction with the narrative itself. While the evolution of Adela Furnival from schoolgirl into militant suffragette clearly follows the lines of traditional *bildungsroman* novels, the portrayal of the central character in "The Sentinel" is problematic. Adela becomes a two-dimensional figure at times, a vehicle for the young Rebecca's newest ideas and theories. By the end of the novel, her militancy loses its *raison d'être*.

More important, the instability of the novel results partially from West's shifting agendas which eventually run counter to each other. The narrative as a whole disintegrates not only because it is weakly plotted in parts, but because the political commentary runs against the grain of her attempted portrayal of the psychology of her characters. It is a multilayered novel which practises a variety of voices - the omniscient confidence of a George Eliot narrator, the militant rhetoric of the WSPU, and the documentary detail of the newspaper article. The melodramatic voice evident in certain sections of the novel derives in part from her own attraction to the theatrical and from genres like the "New Woman" novel. Threaded through these uncertain, often derivative voices is an even more uncertain one - that of a self-conscious artist. The numerous references to literary and other texts reveals the anxiety of the young writer who is trying to position her own text.

Journalism was one way of channelling and re-expressing many of the preoccupations already evident in "The Sentinel". A distinctive voice began to emerge in her articles for feminist and left-wing papers, retaining traces of the authoritative declarations in "The

Sentinel", but newly ironic, satirical and humorous. Still preoccupied with her fictional heroine, West began rewriting "The Sentinel" as *Adela*, possibly at the same time she began writing for *The Freewoman*.

Chapter Two

Adela, The Freewoman and Other Radicals

> "It is true that the women have burned a tea-house in Kew Gardens, but it was only a little one".[1]

Becoming a Freewoman

Although West had probably given up work on "The Sentinel" some time before she began publishing her articles and reviews in *The Freewoman*,[2] there are several important links between the novel and her early journalism. The story of Rosie Essletree in "The Sentinel" is a particularly interesting example. In a piece written for *The Freewoman* in 1912, West alludes to the trial and acquittal of Daisy Lord, a laundress who killed her baby. This story, underlying the Rosie Essletree episode, provides an important bridge between "The Sentinel" and the emergence of West's journalistic voice. In "The Sentinel", Rosie's predicament as a poverty-stricken laundress, abandoned mistress and murderer of her own child, inspires a heavy-handed authorial critique of the State.

> Rosie Essletree's chief enemy appeared to have been the State. In flat contradiction of Professor Huxley the State had adjudged Rosie to have but one parent; and chose the weaker. The State had conferred on Rosie the benefits of a free education so practical that at fourteen the well behaved, quick-witted girl was flung into the comparatively unskilled and non-productive labour of the laundry. The State apparently admired this laundry; it admired it so warmly that it left it free from many of those restrictions it laid on the factory or the shop. It gave no help to the laundry-girls: occasionally its more distinguished servants advised them to combine. Combination being an easy matter for women exhausted mentally and physically by their excessive toil, terrorised by the threat of dismissal from an occupation to which they are by reputation and tradition virtually bound, often forced by poverty into self corruption. (S, **p. 35**,Volume II, V, 5).

The Freewoman version is both strikingly similar and subtly different:

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[1]Rebecca West, "The Mildness of Militancy", *The Clarion* 28 February 1913, *YRB*, p. 159.

[2]West had already begun publishing her writing before her involvement with *The Freewoman*. According to Glendinning, "She was still at the Academy [of Dramatic Art] when her first journalism was published: a review of Gorky's play *Lower Depths*, for the London *Evening Standard*. The regular theatre critic was unable to go and gave her the two free tickets [...] on condition she sent in a notice" (Glendinning, pp. 35-36). Rollyson adds to this: "The paper liked the review and gave her temporary work" (Rollyson, p. 17).

> The State kindly allowed Daisy Lord to be born fatherless in a workhouse ward, and then kicked her and her mother out into the cold and dirt. After having provided Daisy with an expensive education which seems to have been no earthly use to her, the State permitted her to enter a laundry. By neglecting to inspect that laundry or to interfere when the owner paid Daisy a pittance of from five to ten shillings a week, the State tacitly consented to Daisy being brought to such a state of physical and mental starvation that any kind of emotion - even illicit and imprudent love - was a thing not to be resisted. Then, when she was going to have a child, the State created such a strong feeling against her that the last drop of courage was squeezed out of a weakened body, and she dared not risk exposure by calling assistance during childbirth. So that, in a fit of delirium, she killed her baby.[3]

The theatrical tone of the passage from the novel reflects not only typical suffragette rhetorical practices and West's own instinct for the dramatic, but also a clumsy imitation of a particular high Victorian style. In this passage, West uses a self-conscious and heavy-handed irony around Professor Huxley and the State, rendering the Rosie Essletree episode obscure and confusing. In the journalistic version of the story, the language is controlled, concise and more subtly ironical than the melodramatic and inflated novelistic description. Here, West elicits sympathy through a restrained yet emotive vocabulary couched within a more direct and efficient style. Thus the transition between the two passages reveals one of the shaping processes through which West's journalistic voice began to emerge from the raw material of her literary and political interests. A more delicate irony and greater concision create a sharper focus for the theatrical nature of her narrative. The distinctive voice of the speaker and the implied audience,[4] so awkward in the novel, is more effectively adapted to the forum offered by *The Freewoman*. This feminist journal, to which West began contributing in 1911, provided the appropriate platform and readership for the development of such a style.

The brief history of *The Freewoman* is fascinating in itself, not least because it ended

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[3] *The Freewoman*, 25 April 1912, *YRB*, p. 37.

[4] This voice is reminiscent of the Victorian sages such as Carlyle or Ruskin, but it is clumsily overwritten.

up under the editorship of Ezra Pound as *The Egoist,* publishing works by T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and other "canonised" modernists. Dora Marsden, disenchanted with the WSPU and her role within that organisation, launched and edited the journal in 1911. For Marsden, it "mark[ed] the point at which feminism in England ceases to be impulsive and unaware of its own features, and becomes definitely self-conscious and introspective. For the first time Feminists themselves make the attempt to reflect the Feminist movement in the mirror of thought".[5] The journal offered an initial forum for some of the debates which still preoccupy contemporary feminists. It was radical in every sense of the word and set out to be so. In it, Marsden wished to include all manner of subjects and to provoke controversy and discussion whenever possible: "It seems fruitless to affirm that our business is to annihilate thought, to shatter the new lamps no less than the old, to dissolve ideas, the 'right' as well as the 'wrong'".[6] According to Les Garner, Marsden made the aim and the scope of the paper clear before the appearance of the first issue, declaring that:

> *The Freewoman* was going to expand its terms and 'give it new significance... the great change which the Feminist Movement seeks to bring about is not merely a matter of political readjustment...carried to success, it would accomplish a vast revolution in the entire field of human affairs, intellectual, sexual, domestic, economic, legal and political'. Hinting at potential controversy, she added: 'it will be an open paper and will not be afraid to publish anything which has behind it thought and knowledge'.[7]

The paper lived up to Marsden's predictions. In Rebecca West's words, it "mentioned sex loudly and clearly and repeatedly and in the worst possible taste".[8] In addition, it endorsed free love and affirmed the sexuality of women. It criticised marriage and defended homosexuality and it acted "as a forum for revolutionary political currents, with socialism,

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[5]*The Freewoman*, 23 November, 1911.
[6]Marsden, *The New Freewoman*, 15 August, 1913.
[7]Les Garner, *Dora Marsden*, pp. 56-57.
[8]Rebecca West, "The 'Freewoman'", *Time and Tide*, 16 July 1926: 648-649, reprinted in *The Gender of Modernism.*

Marxism, syndicalism and anarchism all represented within its pages".[9] *The Freewoman,* later *The New Freewoman,* not only reflected the mood of a period characterised by innovation and change, it contributed to and created it. Airing a variety of controversial debates of the time, it also attacked certain aspects of the feminist movement as vigorously as it defended feminism. As a radical feminist journal, it questioned the conventionally ascribed differences between men and women which created hierarchies and inequalities, and also cast light on political and philosophical differences within the suffrage movements.

> *The Freewoman's* prescriptions are not always clear but they do reflect the papers [sic] historical and theoretical importance. First, despite all the pressures to conform to gender-bound roles and a rigid standard of moral behaviour, revolutionary perspectives on sexuality, reproduction and the domestic and maternal ideology emerged. ... And, secondly, the discussion within the journal provided an acute and contemporary criticism of the major feminist positions within mainstream suffragism.[10]

Criticism of an excessive emphasis on the vote and of a lack of direction in feminist policies was voiced in many articles. Most significant, perhaps, was the emergent awareness of the need to articulate theories about feminists and feminism. This is a most important context for West's writing as published in *The Freewoman* and in subsequent journals.

"West had been introduced originally to Dora Marsden and *The Freewoman* through Mary Gawthorpe...".[11] In her first article for the newly created *Freewoman*, West declared that "There are two kinds of imperialists - imperialists and bloody imperialists".[12] Her verbal shock tactics, analogous to the suffragette practice of dressing delicately and committing violent acts, were perfectly suited to this new feminist journal which prided itself on its anarchist streak. Her articles examined and voiced definitions of feminism and aesthetics, arising out of current thought and from her own personal perceptions and problems. The

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[9]Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 73.
[10]Garner, *Stepping Stones*, p. 72. This is an excellent chapter on *The Freewoman*.
[11]Garner, *Dora Marsden*, p. 93.
[12]*The Freewoman*, 30 November 1911, signed Cicily Fairfield.

encouragement to air unconventional views and to foster public debate "by publishing articles and correspondence from all sides"[13] suited and moulded West's early "cut and thrust" journalistic style. Such a style, which soon earned her notoriety and fame[14] was cemented by her choice of name. Cicely Fairfield, recently failed actress and would-be novelist (alias Isabel Lancashire), chose the name of the heroine of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, Rebecca West.[15] This was the name that readers came to associate with acerbic wit, irreverence and an acute analytic style, not only in *The Freewoman*, but in other radical papers too. Although *The Freewoman* is the most interesting paper the young West wrote for, because of its anarchic and feminist beginnings and because of its later literary history,[16] she also contributed to a number of other papers which cut against the traditional grain - political or literary. One of them was *The Clarion* "[T]hough a socialist paper, [it] gave space in its columns to many other topics than socialist questions; it was highly original, colloquial, and constantly interesting".[17] She also wrote for the *Daily News*, "dedicated to free trade and social justice" and several other left-wing papers, many of which supported the suffrage movement.[18]

Several issues central to "The Sentinel" and later to the *Adela* fragment, became part

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[13]Barash, p. 43.

[14]"Brash reviews and outspoken opinions, begun at the *Freewoman*, won her the attention of the anti-suffragist Mary Humphry Ward, Edwardian uncles Wells and Shaw, the transitional modernist Ford Madox Ford, and the modernists D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf" (Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism*, p. 43).

[15]In an interview in 1972, West declared: "I had an impossible name. I don't think anybody could really be taken seriously as a writer under the name of Cicily Isabel Fairfield. It sounds like something blonde and pretty, like Mary Pickford". Having discovered that the article she had sent to *The Freewoman* was to be used on the advertising poster and fearful of her mother discovering she was involved in a forbidden activity, she had to act in a hurry: "I had the Ibsen play with me, and I just said: 'Oh, call me Rebecca West'. So it appeared: an article on Mrs Humphry Ward by Rebecca West, and I was committed for life to that rather harsh name" ("Dame Rebecca West talks to Anthony Curtis about social improvements and literary disasters", *The Listener*, 15 February 1973, pp. 211-213).

[16]*The Freewoman* lasted only eleven months, collapsing in October 1912, partly because of financial problems and partly because of disagreements and a lack of direction in editorial policy. It was revived as *The New Freewoman* in June 1913, and Rebecca West was instrumental in its revival. As Les Garner points out: Harriet Weaver, "soon to be a major contributor of cash, and organizer in general of *The New Freewoman*, was, along with Rebecca West, vital to the paper's revival" (Garner, *Dora Marsden*, p. 92).

[17]*YRB*, intro., p. 89.

[18]*YRB*, intro., p. 294.

of West's journalistic repertoire in these papers. Adela's indictment of education in "The Sentinel" anticipates West's attack on women's education and the way in which women are shaped by gender and class assumptions in several articles.[19] West also discusses the dilemmas of the single mother, tackles the problems of prostitution with more sympathy and understanding than in "The Sentinel", and scrutinizes contemporary ideologies of motherhood: "Now it is the habit of men to say that the woman with the child in her arms is the ideal which they all serve and respect, but I have noticed that this respect for motherhood is usually produced as an offensive weapon against women who are not mothers when they demand the ordinary privileges of humanity".[20] In many of her articles, West deploys a contemporary feminist rhetoric which she adapts for her own purposes. Feminist rhetoric at this time tended to be based on traditionally masculine discourses, although as Rita Felski points out: "As feminists appropriated traditionally male-centered notions of evolution, revolution, equality, liberty, and citizenship in their fight for emancipation, the meanings of these terms shifted and resonated differently".[21] West's adaptation of these discourses is particularly interesting in her pieces on suffragism and militant feminist action.

Drawing on the militant discourses she had already begun to use in "The Sentinel", and on a socialist vocabulary drawn from her Fabian and socialist readings, West criticises society's treatment of women and workers in several articles, often couching her attacks in the language of war. Her definitions of feminism range from satire against the establishment - "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat

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[19]For example, West declared that she "saw in [her] own education some of the things which eat the power out of women", "A Training in Truculence", *The Clarion* 14 February 1913, *YRB*, p. 154.

[20]"The Sheltered Sex", *The Clarion* 4 July 1913, *YRB*, p. 185.

[21]Felski, p. 149.

or a prostitute"[22] - to overt references to the war between the sexes. In an essay on Mrs Pankhurst, a moving tribute despite her differences with the suffragette leader, Rebecca West provided a perspective on her early feminist perceptions.

> When she [Mrs Pankhurst] started the Women's Social and Political Union she was sure of two things: that the ideas of freedom and justice which had been slowly developing in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had grown to such maturity that there existed an *army* of women resentful of being handicapped by artificial disadvantages imposed simply on the grounds of their sex, and that sex-antagonism was so strong among men that it produced an attitude which, if it were provoked to candid expression, would make every self-respecting woman want to *fight* it. (My italics)[23]

West articulates the views current in early feminism of a difference between the sexes, so strongly emphasized that the relationship can be described in terms akin to tribal warfare. Such a view seems to be conveyed in "Indissoluble Matrimony" where a literal battle of the sexes takes place. While it has been argued that the attitudes that inspired the suffrage cause were based on essentialism,[24] and certainly West's feminism can be said to draw on these beliefs, she also interrogates them. The disadvantages suffered by women are "imposed", that is, they are constructed and transferred onto the other sex which is then defined in terms of an opposition. Her references to women as an "army" poised to do battle recall the military imagery which saturates "The Sentinel". As Vicinus points out: "Fighting for a higher cause - with the weapons of moral superiority - seemed a natural way to describe the struggle for the vote. The language, iconography and, ultimately, the behaviour of the WSPU, portrayed an army at war with society".[25] At the same time, West was to use this discourse more critically than she had done in "The Sentinel", revealing alternative possibilities of activism. In an article entitled "Feminism", West criticizes the violent

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[22]"Mr Chesterton in Hysterics", *The Clarion* 14 November 1913, *YRB*, p. 219.
[23]Rebecca West, "A Reed of Steel", from *The Post-Victorians*, 1933, *YRB*, p. 255.
[24]"The essentialist case for women's political emancipation was built upon an analysis of what it is to be female that conflated sex and gender" (Holton, p. 13).
[25]Vicinus, pp. 260-261.

campaigns of the WSPU and suggests that more could be achieved by a subtle infiltration campaign from within. Women would do better by talking to and "educating" fellow male workers, rather than lingering in prison for violent offences against property. But this alternative is no less forceful:

> For certainly we need rebellion. Unless woman is going to make trouble she had better not seek her emancipation. Men are reaping the reward of docility in their slavery. The increasingly dangerous temper of the oppressing classes and the smouldering hatred among the oppressed call for a last decisive battle. The beginnings of militancy made us hope that woman would lead the workers to this Armageddon of labour. Is she really too busy holding drawing-room meetings?[26]

Once again, West appropriates a masculine vocabulary with associations of revolution and liberation in order to mobilise the traditionally passive realm of women.[27] Here too, West expresses concern across gender and class lines, binding the two in a common quest for freedom and political recognition. West's frequent calls to arms in this early journalism both emulate and restructure the rhetoric of militant feminism. Felski's discussion of feminist rhetorical devices is useful here: "A characteristic technique is the repeated invocation of a unitary "we" around which the claims of the text are organized. This "we" becomes the grammatical subject of programmatic statements, exhortations, and demands, articulating a communal solidarity which grounds and legitimates the author's speaking position".[28] West often makes use of this device in her journalism: "Ladies of Great Britain, we are clever, we are efficient, we are trustworthy, we are twice the women that our grandmothers were, but we have not enough devil in us".[29] The grand claims she makes here, repeatedly invoking the unitary "we", are typical of contemporary feminist discourse, which "often relies on

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[26]"Feminism", *Daily Herald* 5 September 1912, *YRB*, p. 368.

[27]West's use of revolutionary metaphors is typical of contemporary feminist rhetoric. As Felski points out: "This invocation of the revolutionary ideal frequently coincided with a heightened and hyperbolic use of language, as feminist discourse strove to simulate the intensified political activity to which it referred" (*Gender of Modernity*, p. 167).

[28]Felski, p. 152.

[29]"Women and Wages", *The Clarion* 18 October 1912, *YRB*, p. 104.

hyperbolic claims about the condition of all women and men and on a Manichean vocabulary which contrasts the moral high-mindedness of the speaker and her comrades with the iniquity of the government and opponents of female suffrage".[30] This declarative, hyperbolic style, already evident in "The Sentinel", became a feature of the young Rebecca's authoritative journalistic voice.[31] While West appropriates feminist rhetoric, particularly militant feminist rhetoric in her journalism, it is, however, a more critical and incisive appropriation than occurs in "The Sentinel". By 1912 and 1913 she was less enchanted with the WSPU and its militant tactics and social purity doctrines, criticising certain aspects of the movement as vigorously as she praised its courage and determination. Her attitude towards the physical violence practised by the WSPU became increasingly critical, even though in many of her articles she continued to use militant rhetoric as a means of demonstrating woman's alternative and equal powers. Concluding an article published in *The Clarion*, West declared:

> That is why women should not concentrate their intelligences too fixedly on the vote without preparing for the tremendous issues that follow. And that is why socialists should regard the woman's movement as something more important than the fad of a few propertied ladies and women as humble beings to be satisfied by pious opinions concerning the advisability of free milk for babies. When woman came out of the home she came bringing not peace but a sword. Great things depend on how she uses that sword.[32]

This passage succinctly represents Rebecca West's dissenting membership of the militant section of the women's movement, while retaining her own radical vision. Critical of the narrow focus on the vote by movements such as the WSPU, West foresaw the need for action far beyond that single achievement. Not only did she highlight gender and class prejudice, but also stereotyping. Women, she urges her readers to remember, are not necessarily

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[30]Felski, p. 152.
[31]See Jane Marcus's article "A Voice of Authority" in *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*, pp. 237-246.
[32]"The Future of the Middle Classes", *The Clarion* 1 November 1912, *YRB*, p. 115.

instinctively peaceful or passive, nor should they always be associated with motherhood. Instead, West saw equality as a liberation from the domestic sphere which would also be a release into a position of power, symbolised by the carrying of a sword. For this reason, the suffragette icon of the warrior woman is vividly present in her critique of certain suffragette doctrines.

West's appropriation of militant language or imagery in her journalism is often accompanied by other tactics to create shock and outrage - the treatment of her subject with irreverence or irony or both. This is what made West's mature voice distinctive, both from her own early novel and from other contemporary feminist articles and treatises. Holding nothing sacred, she attacked revered writers, respected religious figures, scientists, politicians and even certain well-known feminists. Strindberg, she declared, "could not write",[33] and Mrs Humphry Ward was "the woman who will not think".[34] Arnold Bennett, as prolific and as respected as Mrs Humphry Ward, was treated more appreciatively, but with similar irreverence:

> Now it is a strange thing that Mr Arnold Bennett, with all his faculty for seeing through brick walls, is never completely successful in portraying young women. Always his young women have the slightly vulgar air of a conjurer trying to make an impressive mystery out of a commonplace trick with a bowl of goldfish and a couple of rabbits. But there again is Mr Bennett's childishness: he has never got over his infantile admiration for the bland, magnificent creature in the draper's windows, whose superb dignity and unchangeable sweetness he does not attribute to the fact that she is made of wax.[35]

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[33]"Strindberg: The English Gentleman I", *The Freewoman* 15 August 1912, *YRB*, p. 56.

[34]"Letter to the Editor of *The Freewoman*",*The Freewoman* 14 March 1912, *YRB*, p. 18.

[35]"The Matador of the Five Towns", *The Freewoman* 4 April 1912, *YRB*, pp. 32-33. West's first review of Arnold Bennett is particularly interesting for several reasons. It marks the beginning of the critical jousting between West and Bennett which was to last until the end of Bennett's life. See West's *The Strange Necessity* (1928) where she famously refers to Bennett as one of her literary uncles, and Bennett's response in "My Brilliant but Bewildering 'Niece'" rpt. in *Books and Persons 1926-1931*, ed. Andrew Mylett, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), pp. 183-186. It also precedes and complicates Virginia Woolf's much-quoted attack on the Edwardian writers in her essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923) in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 3, 1919-1924*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, (London: Hogarth, 1988). West's reviews of Bennett and other "Edwardian" writers such as H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy, are often appreciative as well as critical; she was ready to value some aspects of their writing as much as attack others. Woolf, West and the Edwardians

In response to the destruction of the tea-house in Kew Gardens by suffragettes in 1913,[36] West launches a scathing attack on those politicians she deems ultimately responsible for the deed: "But I defy any unbiased person to reflect on this history of the past few weeks - on Mr Asquith's obstinacy, Mr Harcourt's and Mr Churchill's squalid dishonesty, Mr Lloyd George's half-sincere, hysterical duplicity and the Speaker's deep malice - and not regard these outbursts as legitimate tantrums".[37] She did not hesitate to confront scientific attempts to categorise 'woman' with satirical reviews and counter-attacks. For example, reviewing *The Fraud of Feminism* for *The Clarion*, West wrote:

> There is a journalistic curse of Eve. The woman who writes is always given anti-feminist books to review. Thus to earn my keep I have read the fluffy yet resistant matter of Dr Saleeby, and consequently felt as though I had swallowed a feather-bed. I have watched Dr Lionel Tayler's interminable sentences crawl along like a centipede gone lame in every other foot. I have been enveloped in the fog-like featureless gloom of Sir Almroth Wright.[38]

In this piece, Rebecca West makes a public declaration that she is a woman who has a profession, a need to earn a living, and that she is here carving her right to a political and literary opinion within the sacred wood of male-dominated domains. Adapting the strategies of repetition and hyperbole[39] of the feminist speaker, West deflates and ridicules her subject. She is also adept at using scientific discourses in order to turn arguments upside down, employing imagery usually attached to male representations of women's minds and writing. For example, Mr Bax

> states without shame that one out of four of his women friends are subject to periodic attacks of mental instability, and gives us an unpleasant impression of the sane ones by affirming it 'a fact, undeniable to all those not rendered impervious to facts by preconceived dogma, that, as I have elsewhere put it,

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is an area of research which now needs more subtle and complex treatment.

[36]See my epigraph, "The Mildness of Militancy", *YRB*, p. 150.

[37]*YRB*, p. 160.

[38]"Another Book Which Ought Not to Have Been Written", *The Clarion* 21 November 1913, *YRB*, p. 223.

[39]See Felski, pp. 145-173.

> while man has a sex, woman is a sex', and quotes approvingly an elaboration of this theory by a gifted young man named Weininger who, like the other great anti-feminists, Nietzsche and Strindberg, went mad.[40]

In a sentence of Proustian length and complexity, West begins with the apparent madness of women and completely inverts this concept by the end, attributing madness not only to a well-known philosopher and playwright, but to Mr Bax himself. No public figure, male or female, scientist or novelist, who opposed women's rights to equality, was safe from West's wit and venom. Feminists, especially the WSPU were not exempt: "Life ought not to be divided into watertight compartments. Apparently feminism seems a simple matter to many suffragettes, like floating a patent medicine".[41] Ellen Key, feminist and pacifist, is accused of changing "the continental woman's movement from a march towards freedom to a romp towards voluptuous servitude".[42] West became especially critical of the growing puritanism of the WSPU leadership, seeing within it signs of intolerance and hatred that feminism had set out to counter: "The strange uses to which we put our new-found liberty! There was a long and desperate struggle before it became possible for women to write candidly on subjects such as these. That this power should be used to express views that would be old-fashioned and uncharitable in the pastor of a Little Bethel is a matter for scalding tears".[43]

The hero-worship of the suffragettes and the militant action of "The Sentinel" is transformed in the early journalism into sympathetic portrayals of suffragette courage and endeavour as well as acute criticism of the underlying flaws in their doctrine and practices. Employing the same rhetoric to undercut as well as to support, and infusing her prose with wit and irony, West found a method and a voice in which to discuss the issues and preoccupations arising from her first novel. As Lyn Pykett points out, through her

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[40] *YRB*, pp. 223-224.
[41] "The Future of the Middle Classes", *The Clarion* 1 November 1912, *YRB*, p. 111.
[42] "The Sin of Self Sacrifice", *The Clarion* 12 December 1913, *YRB*, p. 235.
[43] "On Mentioning the Unmentionable", *The Clarion* 16 September 1913, *YRB*, p. 206.

journalism, West "self-consciously used writing as a form of intervention in the public sphere". Writing became a form of politics and politics became one way in which she deliberately "constructed herself as a modern woman of letters".[44]

Rewriting "The Sentinel": *Adela*

While she rapidly made a name for herself in the sphere of political journalism, West still had strong literary ambitions and opinions (evident in her many book and theatre reviews), and it is most likely that she started rewriting "The Sentinel" as *Adela* during the early part of her journalistic career (late 1911/1912).[45] West cannibalised "The Sentinel" in writing *Adela*, especially the earliest section. The story of the schoolgirl Adela and her seduction in "The Sentinel" is expanded, altered and politicized. West retains the Midland setting in her second attempt, but she makes it more industrial and more evocative of the living conditions of the Fairfield family when they moved to Edinburgh.

Saltgreave, the fictional town in *Adela*, is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's 'unreal city'. Squalid in its ugliness, "a network of narrow alleys overhung by the livid fumes of the factories",[46] it is a city redeemed neither by its *nouveau riche* nor by its poor. The place where the Fairfield family lived in Edinburgh was, as Victoria Glendinning points out: "in 1902 ... nearly a slum, and the lanes around it were dark and dirty".[47] In "The Sentinel", Adela is an orphan living with wealthy relatives and she finally inherits a fortune. West's first novel is, in part, a fantasy, a projection of a desired future, where, as an orphan, the heroine is removed from difficult family circumstances. Moving closer to her own experience, West recreates the heroine of *Adela* as an impoverished schoolgirl, who wins a

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[44]Pykett, "Politics, Modernism, and the Woman of Letters: Rebecca West's Early Journalism".
[45]See my discussion of the dates of "The Sentinel" and *Adela* in Chapter One.
[46]Till, p. 17.
[47]Glendinning, p. 27.

scholarship to study science at university. Requiring further financial help for her studies, Adela's mother approaches her wealthy brother, Tom Motley, who refuses any assistance. Following this incident, Adela's feckless father returns home after a long absence. In Part Three of the fragment, Adela, furious with both her father and her uncle, sets off to visit wealthy relatives in the country. Here she meets a variety of people including an architect, who interests her, before the fragment breaks off.

In a much more precarious position, then, than her predecessor, the heroine in *Adela* is caught between the crass materialism of her uncle, her mother's poverty, and her father's irresponsibility. This is Adela's father's legacy to his daughter: "He had started out with all the things she lusted for today - wealth, unbounded opportunities for education, gentle, kind people all about him, surroundings of beauty and comfort ... And he ended like this - a horrid messenger of sponging and blackmail to two poor women" *(A,* pp. 40-41). West's anger directed against the fictionalised father derived from personal anger. In *Family Memories*, published posthumously, West writes: "The detachment of my father from the consequences of his actions was almost a cause, like his anti-socialism. The whole strength of his being was turned in a direction which led him away from his wife and children".[48] But as a journalist and political thinker, West was his heir.

> "I cannot remember a time when I had not a rough idea of what was meant by capitalism, socialism, individualism, anarchism, liberalism and conservatism...I grew up with a knowledge of politics and economics comparable to the knowledge of religion automatically acquired by children in a churchgoing and bible-reading household".[49]

As Faith Evans says: "It was certainly from Charles Fairfield ... that Rebecca West acquired her passion for abstract ideas and her enquiring view of the world, though she quickly

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[48]Rebecca West, *Family Memories: An Autobiographical Journey*, ed. Faith Evans, (London: Virago, 1987), p. 203.
[49]Evans, p. 2.

transformed it into a feminist vision which was not his at all".[50] West's story of Adela in this second version reinstates the father, and reacts to him as a tyrannical absence, where the nature of his legacy is scrutinized and interrogated. The absent mother in "The Sentinel" appears in *Adela* too, as a weak and pathetic woman, worn down by poverty and the bullying of her brother and husband.[51] Adela is disgusted by her mother's passive acceptance of her prodigal father's return: "Impossible, extraordinary mother, who rejoiced in the enslavement of her daughter that she might support in idleness a scoundrel who had outraged her even to the last sin" (*A*, p. 42).

Adela's violent reaction to the dependent and exploitative relationship between her parents belongs to West's analysis of the restrictions imposed on women in a patriarchal society, particularly within the institution of marriage. Although marriage is touched on in "The Sentinel" (the heroine refuses three offers of marriage), it is much more important as an issue in *Adela*, reflecting the many articles and discussions that had appeared in *The Freewoman* and other papers. For Adela in the second version, marriage has little to recommend it: "Marriage as she had seen it in her sordid world - [was] the leering secrecy of young love, the long squalid indignities of maternity endured in stuffy kitchens and mean parlours..." (*A*, p. 28). In a society where women's choices remained very limited, Adela, whose familial breakdown and ensuing poverty have relegated her to the status of the lower middle class, has only marriage or menial work as options: "There's nothing to keep me from marriage now. Typing in Uncle Tom's works is drudgery that a machine could do - slavery that girls do anything to escape". (*A*, p. 27). The sense that marriage is seen as a business contract, entered into through careful negotiation or through wheeling and dealing, and

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[50]Evans, p. 2.

[51]West's description of the second Adela is by no means purely autobiographical. The poverty and squalor are exaggerated in the story and Mrs Furnival, Adela's mother, is a much more pathetic creature than any of West's portrayals of her own mother, Isabella Fairfield. See *Family Memories*.

disgust at the nature of such a contract, is made very clear in *Adela*. In "The Sentinel", West touches on the issue of marriage as a "business" contract in the depiction of Adela's visit to her cousin Maud Seppel, voluptuous, flirtatious and married to a wealthy older man. But her representation of the degradation of such an arrangement is much more forceful in the later version. In *Adela*, the voluptuous Maud, her uncle's niece by marriage, has escaped from the squalor facing Adela by marrying a rich old man. It is described as a "purely business deal" (*A*, p. 23), and the drab old women around her "gazed at her with a kind of melancholy admiration: she really had done pretty well out of a bargain out of which they hadn't made much" (*A*, p. 22). Using the only weapons she has, Maud plays the marriage game and wins it at a price. Adela refuses to play this game which, as the story suggests, can be seen as a form of high class prostitution. Maud's declaration that her husband would refuse her nothing implies this: "She crossed her knees and smiled at her slippers. 'Nor should he. He can't expect to get something for nothing'". (*A*, p. 23).

The idea of marriage as prostitution was highly topical at the time, discussed vigorously by the suffragettes and also by the contributors to the more radical *Freewoman.*[52] A book written by Cicely Hamilton in 1909, *Marriage as a Trade*, "characterised marriage as a sordid deal in which a woman sold her body in return for her keep but no wage".[53] But Cicely Hamilton, in line with WSPU thinking, advocated a withdrawal from sexuality altogether. Such an approach reached an extreme in Christabel Pankhurst's doctrine of sexual purity, *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (1913), which advocated the need for a purification of male sexuality to bring it into line with female sexuality. West was not in sympathy which such an approach and in *Adela*, she advocates something more characteristic

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[52]See, for example, Dora Marsden's "The Immorality of the Marriage Contract", *The New Freewoman* June 20, 1912.

[53]Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 75.

of the many articles which were to appear in 1911 and 1912 in *The Freewoman*. Marriage was seen to limit sexual expression while "debasing [the] female human being to the level of common merchandise".[54] Instead, free love unions were frequently proposed, and discussions "developed into an affirmation of the sexuality of women and of their equal right to enjoy sex without conception".[55] The desirability of such freedom of sexuality and the freedom to express the existence of female sexuality, can be seen clearly in Part three of *Adela* when she exchanges glances with a young man.

> Over his smooth face there flashed an expression of soft, casual voluptuousness. It was not discourteous, it was not evil. It was merely a shameless recognition and response to her beauty, and a comment on it ... 'If you and I were lovers, that would be jolly, wouldn't it?'... In Saltgreave one was ashamed of one's most decent joys, just as one was ashamed of having a baby, even though one was married. The very simplest and most innocent passions of humanity were dissembled. (*A*, p. 47)

West's advocacy of the need to acknowledge sexuality and the need for sexual openness in *Adela*, makes an interesting contrast with its predecessor. In "The Sentinel", Adela's experience of sexuality and desire is ambivalent, both towards her seducer and her would-be lover, Robert Langlad. In contrast, the heroine of *Adela* is less experienced, but her attitude towards the ways in which society circumscribes sexuality are expressed with less anxiety and uncertainty than in "The Sentinel". Exposure to new and hitherto unexpressed views on sexuality in *The Freewoman* and *New Freewoman* no doubt gave West the confidence and the framework within which to rework and rethink her heroine's sexuality.

In addition to her criticism of the social mores of the day, West again investigates the issue of class and the different light this casts on so-called moral behaviour. West's early feminist and socialist journalism concentrates much of its energies on the problems of class divisions for a women's movement. Unlike Adela in "The Sentinel", who is less classifiable

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[54] *The New Freewoman* June 20, 1912, p. 81.
[55] Garner, *Dora Marsden*, pp. 66-67.

because she has no parents, (although it is made clear that some of her relatives have made money through industry), the second Adela and her immediate family have fallen into the near-poverty of the lower middle classes.[56] And like the young Rebecca West, she is already a radical and fervent socialist.[57] As a result of this, West's story functions not only as a somewhat simplistic criticism of the forces of capitalism and imperialism ("To possess such luxuries as this had Tom Motley imperilled his immortal soul and ground down the faces of the poor" *A*, p. 20), it is also a virulent and heartfelt attack on the men who exploit women in the same way. West makes this analogy often in her early journalism, stating for example, that "the relations between the rich and the poor are often paralleled by the relations between men and women".[58] Tom Motley's refusal to finance Adela's opportunity for a real education is a refusal to spend money on what he considers to be a bad investment. In addition to the domineering power-play of the uncle, Adela's father exerts another kind of tyranny when he returns later in the story to sponge off what little resources remain to her and her mother.

Adela's rebelliousness, her political affiliations, and her prospective employment as a typist, make her a prototype for the feminist heroine of West's later novel, *The Judge*. The typist, whom Adela rejects as another kind of slave is, nevertheless, a significant new female presence both in fiction and in actuality, in the lower class working force.

> Thousands upon thousands of women came forward to work as 'typewriters', a phenomenon that helped spawn a whole literature on the 'new woman' - that independent-minded female who had abandoned the boredom of the suburbs for her dingy bed-sit in the middle of town, who studied at a secretarial college and took it for granted that she would earn her own

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[56]"The lower middle class in Britain can be divided into two main groups. On the one hand was the classic petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers and small businessmen, on the other the new white collar salaried occupations, most notably clerks but also managers, commercial travellers, schoolteachers and certain shop assistants". Geoffrey Crossick, ed., *The Lower Middle Class in Britain*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 12. It is important to note here that it is poverty rather than birth that relegates Adela to this class. Adela's father, like West's father, has aristocratic origins.

[57]These affiliations are less obvious in the description of the schoolgirl Adela in "The Sentinel".

[58]"A New Woman's Movement: The Need for Riotous Living", *The Clarion,* 20 December, 1912, *YRB*, p. 134.

living.[59]

Adela, whether she becomes a typist or not, is a "New Woman" figure who challenges the conventional portrayal of the lower middle classes and women. To illustrate this point, a brief comparison with Forster's Leonard Bast in *Howards End*, is revealing. Leonard Bast is a bank clerk with higher aspirations, and his poverty is both a humiliation and a frustration to him. While he hankers after art and culture, Adela longs for clean laboratories, knowledge and an eradication of middle class pretensions. Adela's scientific and feminist aspirations are similar to her predecessor in "The Sentinel", although her yearnings are stronger in the rewritten version since financially she is less likely to achieve her desire for further education.[60] Like Leonard Bast, Adela is also a social misfit. It was a position West herself identified with closely, having experienced poverty and subsequent humiliation within her family. As Victoria Glendinning says: "It was those who were on a cusp, without acknowledged status in any section of the community, who felt social differences most painfully".[61]

E.M. Forster's portrait of Leonard Bast both parallels and diverges from West's depiction of a character in similar circumstances.

> The boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but he could see it, and at times people whom he knew had dropped in, and counted no more. He knew that he was poor, and would admit it; he would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich. This may be splendid of him. But he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as loveable.[62]

West completely subverts the stereotyping of class and gender in the adolescent figure of her

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[59]Phillips, Anne, *Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class*, (London: Virago, 1987), p. 50.

[60] The ambitions of both heroines are reminiscent of and perhaps influenced by H.G. Wells's notorious heroine, Anne Veronica in the eponymous novel published in 1909.

[61]Glendinning, p. 27.

[62]E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 58.

heroine. Adela may be on the extreme verge of gentility, but she has none of the symptoms which, Forster suggests, are provoked by this condition. Bast's weakness comes perhaps from being displaced from one class but hindered from reaching the next class up.[63] Adela, by contrast, is not undermined by her harsh experiences. Nonetheless, she senses herself as alternately at the edge of the abyss and all-powerful. She despises the materialism of her uncle and the fortune-hunting of Maud while rejoicing in her own intellectual superiority, and, most importantly, in her own physical prowess. Despite the melodramatic style of West's description of Adela, awkwardly emulating the fluctuating emotions of the moody heroine, this celebration of the female body is significant. Already so evident in "The Sentinel" and her early journalism, it emerges as a defining feature of her feminism and one of the many preoccupations of *The Freewoman*.

Leonard Bast is inherently weak; he dies of heart disease. In contrast, Adela's physical beauty and strength are foregrounded from the very beginning of the story, and developed in such a way that she becomes a subversion of all that is conventionally feminine. Adela is first seen as she "caressed her hip and thigh" and she is described as "that seething whirlpool of primitive passions, that destructive centre of intellectual unrest, that shy shameless savage, a girl of seventeen" (*A*, p. 18). Adela's victory over the young hooligans she encounters whilst carrying her mother home, is both humorous and revealing. In one way, this is the fantasy of a young follower of the suffragette movement, which envisaged itself as fighting a sex war, and which demanded equal rights on the basis of sexual equality. Having "knocked three loafers flat on their backs" (*A*, p. 36), Adela seizes her mother and dashes off: "It was against the traditions of English gentlewomen, but it was war, and it was superb. In a second she had caught up her mother again in her arms and was coursing down

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[63]I am indebted to Dr David Medalie for his helpful comments on Forster here.

the alley like a greyhound" (*A*, p. 36). The scene is an interesting one, not only for its humorous evocation of suffragette and militant fantasies, but also for West's own self-conscious and wry awareness of the flaws within these fantasies, shown by Mrs Furnival's irritable reaction to the incident and Adela's sense of deflation following her moment of triumph. "It was terrible to be seventeen. Her heart quaked to see their deep affection turn to nothingness between her own 'queerness' and her mother's fatigued peevishness" (*A*, pp. 36-37). The self-conscious irony perhaps refers back to West's portrayals of the strength and fortitude of Adela in "The Sentinel", seen here as a projection of her teenage desire for adventure and heroism.

Throughout the story, Adela is characterised by appetite and desire, often formulated within traditionally male images. Earlier on in the story, Adela feels that her uncle has "usurped the power of age or Death and killed all these things while she was still young and *lustful* to *conquer* (my italics) the earth" (*A*, p. 27). Having rescued herself and her mother from the loutish behaviour of the disreputable men, Adela sees her behaviour as chivalrous (*A*, p. 36), and much later in the story when she is with her Aunt Olga in South Hertfordshire, she longs to "strike Evelyn [her cousin] across the mouth and call her out to a duel with pistols" (*A*, p. 52). These desires and imaginings are deliberately unfeminine and they consciously exploit the heroic language and ideals absorbed into suffragette rhetoric. West's admiration for these kinds of heroics displayed by women at the time is evident in her detailed and often melodramatic descriptions of suffragette activities in "The Sentinel" as well as in letters to her sister Lettie. In these letters she often records the violence inflicted on the suffragettes and the brave endurance of these women. For example, in a letter dated December 1909, West describes the courage of one Miss Hudson, who, despite the brutal onslaught by the police "held the purple, white and green flag high above her head the whole

time" (AM Collection). In *Adela*, even the sensuous Maud is described with warlike rhetoric. She is "designed by immoral nature to commit arson among the passions of men" (*A,* p. 21) and her outfit is described as "a golden breastplate of brocade" (*A*, p. 22). Due to Maud's treasonable compliance with the system, in Adela's eyes, she is depicted as a distorted version of the female warrior, resembling the iconography of militant women employed by the suffrage movements, especially the WSPU. As Tickner points out, this type of militant woman "was not domesticated. She claimed her 'womanliness' from another source, that of female heroism in history, allegory and myth".[64] Again, the evocation of the female warrior in *Adela* has its origins in "The Sentinel", particularly in the descriptions of Psyche Charteris. West was to employ comparable iconography in "Indissoluble Matrimony" where the same kind of sex war is played out, but where militant tactics are avoided, revealing perhaps the shift in West's allegiances from the WSPU and her doubts about their methods and approaches. Such doubts are already intertwined with feminist fantasies in *Adela*. The heroine's exhilaration at having defeated the young men and saved her mother is overtly depicted in terms of a *Boys Own* romance: "For the first time Saltgreave seemed as romantic as San Francisco, as dusky with adventurous villainies, as prodigal in opportunites for heroism. Her own chivalry in protecting her mother's age and fragility gave her passionate pleasure" (*A*, p. 36). Adela's sense of depression in the aftermath comes from her recognition of the derivative and inauthentic nature of her action: "She knew that her adventure had been the exploit of a message-boy well-read in penny dreadfuls" (*A*, p. 37). The young, passionate woman who seeks the fulfillment of her desires in the only framework available to her, the boy's adventure story, ultimately finds this partial identification both inadequate and disappointing.[65]

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[64]Tickner, p. 207.

West may well have abandoned *Adela* out of a larger sense of its inadequacy and derivativeness, despite its improvements on her earlier novel. Stylistically, the *Adela* fragment is more accomplished than the first part of "The Sentinel", through West's use of irony directed at both herself and at the suffragette movement, and through a more controlled and assured use of language. It also expands on certain issues touched on but not explored in the earlier novel. In the *Adela* fragment, West examines the economic restrictions on her heroine's progress in addition to the prejudices of a male-dominated society represented in "The Sentinel". The fantasy of the wealthy orphan in "The Sentinel" is replaced by a heroine whose familial circumstances deprive her of further education and a future. West retains the visit to wealthy relatives in the country where Adela meets a handsome and seductive older man in *Adela*, although the narrative ends soon after their meeting. She uses the country house setting more than she had done in "The Sentinel" for an exposé of Adela's socialist leanings, through the discussion of a recent strike with her relatives and their friends. The genteel set of her wealthy relatives are contrasted with Adela's home environment:

> In Saltgreave no three people of Adela's set ever met together without delightedly hurling themselves into debate. On an afternoon like this Mr Purkiss and Miss Ralton and she would have finished off the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, the Minimum Wage, and the Disestablishment of the Welsh Church, and then parted reluctantly (*A*, p. 58).

These are all contemporary issues West addresses in "The Sentinel" and in her journalism. The humour in this passage is created by an ironic formulation West also employs in her non-fiction. For example, discussing the enforced ascetism of women in "A New Woman's Movement", West notes: "But then, of course, wherever women are gathered together for the

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[65]It is interesting to note that the young suffragette figure in West's later novel, *The Judge*, is also attracted to the romantic figure of masculine adventure represented by Richard Yaverland, and to her peril. In both *Adela* and *The Judge*, West touches on the subject of girls reading boys adventure stories and the consequences of "reading as a man".

purpose of work their spirits are tamed by partial starvation.[66] The humour is sharper and more focused in "A New Woman's Movement", but the similarities in style and formulation again reveal the proximity of the fiction and journalism at this stage, suggesting that the fiction still serves as a rough copy and as a source for the non-fiction, rather than as something distinctive and different.

A Still Small Voice: Aesthetics and *The Freewoman*

Possible frustration with her fiction attempts, and her discovery of new literary mentors and influences while working for Dora Marsden on *The Freewoman,* may help to explain the abandonment of *Adela.* Her unabashed criticism of well-respected writers in literary reviews for *The Freewoman,* and Marsden's encouragement of aesthetic debates prompted encounters with a range of different writers and new aesthetic ideals, which would shape West's writing in the following decade.

In recent years, the history of *The Freewoman* (1911-1912) and its subsequent transformations into *The New Freewoman* (1913) and finally *The Egoist* (1914 - 1919), has received a great deal of revisionist attention. A number of critics have argued that the importance of *The Egoist* as a receptacle for early modernist writing extends back to its predecessors and the writings of Dora Marsden, revealing important overlaps in the development of early feminist and early modernist thinking.[67] This paper and its series of

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[66]"A New Woman's Movement", *The Clarion* 20 December 1912, *YRB*, p. 133.

[67]The following critics all provide useful readings of Dora Marsden's journal: Robin Hicks, "Gender of the Self: Dora Marsden and the *Freewoman*: Feminist Beginnings of the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*". MLitt Thesis, Oxford University, 1990; Charles Ferrall, "Suffragists, Egoists, and the Politics of Early Modernism", *English Studies in Canada*, XVIII, 4, (December 1992); Carol Barash, "Dora Marsden's Feminism, the *Freewoman*, and the Gender Politics of Early Modernism", *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 49:1, (Autumn 1987); Bruce Clarke, "Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound: The *New Freewoman* and 'The Serious Artist'", *Contemporary Literature* XXXIII, 1, (1992) and *Dora Marsden and Early Moderism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (USA: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Andrew Thacker, "Dora Marsden and *The*

transformations is a vivid illustration of "the way in which the contest over the meaning of feminism, and reactions against the renovatory conceptualization of both the feminine and feminism, constituted an important site upon which literary modernism was defined".[68]

In addition to the often contradictory debates surrounding the female sex and the roles of men and women in a "new" society, many contributors to *The Freewoman* were also interested in contemporary aesthetics: "Demanding truth in art, as in journalism, the *Freewoman* claimed that a radical restructuring of literature - as well as the role literature plays in society - was key to creating a new feminist culture. The *Freewoman* favored [sic] experimental forms of writing, anything that broke through confining Victorian conceptions of the sexes as tragically and sexually at odds".[69] In a letter to Dora Marsden in early 1913, West expressed these views explicitly. Engaged in helping to relaunch *The Freewoman* as *The New Freewoman* in 1913 after the paper's financial collapse (West's contribution was energetic and essential), she complained to Marsden that in the back issues of *The Freewoman*, she had noticed that "there was no literary side to it at all. Visiak and my still small voice were the only notes of dissent in a storm of purely moral and intellectual enthusiasm".[70] In the light of this, she suggests to Marsden that: "A literary side would be a bribe to the more frivolous minded in London, and I don't see why a movement towards freedom of expression in literature should not be associated with and inspired by your gospel".[71] West's literary interests both nurtured and were nurtured by Marsden's paper. Through her often precocious book reviews of well-established writers, West made both

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Egoist: 'Our War is with Words'", *ELT*, 36:2, (1993) and Les Garner's, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden 1882-1960.*

[68]Pykett, p. 43.

[69]Barash, p. 35.

[70]West's claim is slightly exaggerated, as the paper had literary connections from the start, primarily through Mary Gawthorpe whose contacts included H.G. Wells, Mrs G.B. Shaw, Katherine Mansfield and Holbrook Jackson (Hicks, p. 80) and, just as importantly, A.R. Orage and *The New Age* (Clarke, "Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound", p. 95).

[71]Rebecca West to Dora Marsden, Dora Marsden Collection, Princeton University, n. d.

friends and enemies. Among the most important literary and indeed personal friends she made were H.G. Wells and Ford Madox Ford. Wells's literary interests soon turned to sexual ones, drastically affecting the course of West's early career (see biographies for more details). Following her irreverent attack on Wells's novel, *Marriage*, in which she named him "the old maid among novelists",[72] West "defrocked" Ford in a review of his *The New Humpty Dumpty*, written under the name of Daniel Chaucer, stating that: "he continues to insult his readers by throwing them his good books from behind an absurd *nom de plume*".[73] Intrigued, Ford and his mistress, Violet Hunt, invited West to their home, making a place for her in an important literary circle. Recalling this, Violet Hunt wrote:

> At least this particular work gave us Rebecca West, whose literary *flair* and *connaissance du style* could not be deceived or side-tracked, and who, devoting to our effort a whole column of wit and innuendo - as destructive about, as a prairie fire - laid us waste and made us her friends for life.[74]

Both Ford and Hunt[75] had family links with the Pre-Raphaelites, and they were writers and "collectors" of other writers. Ford Madox Ford started the influential and important *English Review* and Violet Hunt provided 'South Lodge' as a meeting place for 'les jeunes'. It was not the first time Hunt had been a literary hostess. She had been involved in artistic circles since 1882; "[B]y 1917 the names of the visitors have changed, from Robert Browning and Oscar Wilde to Ezra Pound and Rebecca West, but the pace has not abated".[76] Among those who frequented these gatherings were Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, H.D., Richard Aldington, Brigit Patmore and, of course, Rebecca West. This period at 'South

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[72]"Marriage", *The Freewoman* 19 September 1912, *YRB*, p. 64.

[73]*The Freewoman* 26 September, 1912, p. 366.

[74]Violet Hunt, *I Have This to Say: The Story of My Flurried Years* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), p. 203.

[75]For more detail see Douglas Goldring's *South Lodge: Reminiscences of Violet Hunt, Ford Madox Ford and The English Review Circle* (London: Constable, 1943) and *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: A Record of the Life and Writings of Ford Madox Ford* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1948); Violet Hunt's *I have this to say: The Story of My Flurried Years* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926) and various biographies of Ford Madox Ford.

[76]Robert Secor & Marie Secor, *The Return of the Good Soldier: Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt's 1917 Diary* (University of Victoria: English Literary Studies, 1983), p. 8.

Lodge' was as important and influential for West as it was for those who observed her. In her 1976 broadcast, *The Novelist's Voice*, West recalled the importance of her meeting with these two literary figures, Ford and Hunt:

> Under their guidance I contemplated a changing fiction which had already in the hands of Henry James and Joseph Conrad, claimed new rights. It was now maintained that the novelist had a right to treat material of the highest seriousness ... At the precise moment when I came under the influence of Ford Madox Hueffer and Violet Hunt, they were helping a writer who had gone a stage further, and was wondering what was meant by "doing right", and speculating as to whether more importance should be given to the liberation of humanity from the repression of instinct by civilisation. This was D.H. Lawrence, and while I think he overstressed the problem, he certainly improved fiction by representing human beings in their full passion and irrationality ... In any case, whatever might be happening in the [future] I looked forward to writing novel after novel, after novel.[77]

The importance of West's association with Ford, and through him, with the writings of Henry James and Joseph Conrad, cannot be over-emphasised. The powerful influence of these early mentors is most evident in West's first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*. At the same time, her meeting with figures such as Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, had, however briefly, a significant effect on her own writing as well as on the history of *The New Freewoman*.

Searching for new writers and contributers for the rejuvenated feminist paper, West asked Ezra Pound for contributions, who, "[s]haring the *New Freewoman's* desire to unsettle Victorian 'sentimentalism', ... offered West his own writing in exchange for access to one page per issue to attract other young, avant-garde writers".[78] Pound's gradual appropriation of the paper, supervising its transformation into the literary paper, *The Egoist*, has been well-documented. So too has West's angry departure from the paper, as the result of a personal crisis (her relationship with Wells and ensuing pregnancy) and her clashes with Pound over editorial policy. She referred to him in 1926 as "an *arriviste* American poet who intended

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[77] *Kaleidoscope: Talks & Documentaries Radio*, Tuesday 15th March 1983. (Recorded 1976).
[78] Barash, p. 48.

to oust me".[79] At the same time, recent revisionist readings of the history of the evolution of *The Freewoman* into *The Egoist,* have revealed the extent to which both Marsden and West were involved in encouraging the journal's shift from feminism to modernism. Focusing particularly on the writing of Marsden, critics[80] have highlighted parallels between Marsden's philosophy of individualism and egoism and that of contemporary avant-garde writers. As Robin Hicks points out, Marsden's "feminist emphasis on personal consciousness was certainly not unrelated to the modernist spirit of individuality".[81] In addition to this, Marsden's appropriation of Nietzschean terminology in order to seek a feminist "will-to-power" and her hostility towards abstraction in language creates further parallels. Andrew Thacker argues persuasively that Marsden's personal philosophy of egoism "dovetailed smoothly with Imagism" and her "theoretical work also parallelled the Imagist campaign to cleanse poetic language of abstraction".[82] Marsden's theorising also included discussions of women and art and the ways in which women artists needed to "liberate themselves from public expectations and negative associations which linked their creative potential to domesticity and procreation".[83] As an avid reader and interpreter of the innovative and the controversial, and as an admirer of Marsden's writing in these papers, West, in her capacity as assistant editor was keen to make space for creators and philosophers of the new. More significantly, the implications of the desire, in Ezra Pound's words, to "make it new" both on the level of feminist politics and aesthetics, is evident in her own early writing.

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[79]"The Freewoman", *Time and Tide* 16 July 1926, rpt. in Dale Spender, *Time and Tide Wait for No Man*, (London: Pandora, 1984), p. 67.

[80]See especially Hicks, Ferral and Thacker.

[81]Hicks, p. 208.

[82]Thacker, p. 182.

[83]Hicks, p. 187.

Chapter Three

Becoming a Literary Freewoman

> "I do not *see* her [West's] script. Like the cat, she walks alone in the serried lines and groves of technique".[1]

Three Spanish Essays

Rebecca West's literary ambitions for herself and for *The Freewoman*, encouraged by her associations with Ford's literary gathering of "Les Jeunes", alerted her to a variety of avant-garde experiments - Futurist, Imagist and Vorticist - mainly through the powerful presences of Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound. In particular, three Spanish pieces West wrote for *The New Freewoman* and a short story that followed, "Indissoluble Matrimony", reveal her engagement, brief as it was, with aspects of the avant-garde. The variety of themes and techniques evident in her writing, vividly illustrate West's own participation in and experimentation with the "contesting and contradictory discourses" of her time, and also some of the overlaps between suffragist and aesthetic movements.

Between June and August 1913, West wrote and published in *The New Freewoman* a series of short pieces which are difficult to categorise or describe.[2] These essays, "Trees of Gold" (15 June 1913: 5-7), "Nana" (1 July 1913: 26-27) and "At Valladolid" (1 August 1913: 66-67), written after a visit to Spain in May 1913, form a curious feminist 'triptych' and they provide a vivid illustration of West's comfortable slippage between a variety of genres. Mixing travel reporting, autobiography and fiction, the three essays trace stages in the journey to and through Spain. The narrator records her departure from England in a fit of feminist pique, alluding to a personal dilemma which biographers have linked to West's

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[1]Violet Hunt, *I Have This to Say*, p. 205.
[2]Bonnie Kime Scott refers to one of these pieces as an "essay/story" (*Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 1, p. 88).

involvement with H.G. Wells.[3] "At Valladolid" is the most "fictional" of the pieces and the most unsuccessful. It recounts the fictional narrator's visit to a Spanish doctor, following a wound inflicted in a suicide attempt.[4] In the other two essays, the landscape and people of Spain, especially the women, are described as a revelation to the narrator who discovers that they embody a passion and vitality dreamt of, but absent from her own life. Focusing primarily on the female body, the Cistercian nuns at Burgos ("Trees of Gold"), the gorgeous stripper in Seville ("Nana") and finally the fictionalised narrator's own body in "At Valladolid", West engaged in "discovering" for herself and for her readers a feminist vitality, passion and potential through a poetic language which both draws on avant-garde experiments and strikes out in quite a different direction.

In "The Sentinel", *Adela,* "Indissoluble Matrimony", and these essays set in Spain, the female body is highlighted and celebrated. The body becomes representative of the regenerative in West's early writing. In the Spanish Essays, the nuns, the gorgeous stripper and the narrator's revitalised self are all versions of the restorative woman. As Bonnie Kime Scott notes: "The restorative woman emerges as an archetype of West's fiction; she is present in rare female relationships as well as [the] heterosexual ones".[5] West's preoccupation with this archetype becomes clearer in the context of her feminist journalism and in the light of her immersion at the time in what Jonathan Rose has called the Edwardian "Cult of Life", where the "regenerative" female figure can also be seen as a challenge to the conventions of contemporary society. According to Rose, the "Cult of Life" could mean: "the surrogate

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[3]See Glendinning and Rollyson as well as Gordon Ray, *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West* (London: Macmillan, 1974) and J.R. Hammond, *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West* (UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

[4]West described this story as "an externalization of internal events in my life" (qtd in Rollyson, p. 27).

[5]Bonnie Kime Scott, "The Strange Necessity of Rebecca West" in *Women Reading Women's Writing*, ed. Sue Roe, (UK: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 28. Kime Scott has reservations about this type however, suggesting that: "While West's regenerative female is a positive figure in that she builds instead of destroys", she is, at the same time: "mindless and selfless in many of her manifestations. She is found most often in foreign or downcast places, or in fantasy" ("The Strange Necessity of Rebecca West", p. 282).

religion of vitalism, the worship of the life process as a spiritual force. It could specifically mean the creation of new life, an erotic impulse breaking out of Victorian constraints and sometimes worshipped as religion itself". All in all, it was "a vague but fervent rallying cry for the poets, social rebels, and emancipated women who were fighting their way out of the drawing rooms of Edwardian England".[6]

This Edwardian "'Yes' to life with no hesitation"[7] had many permutations, the variety of which cannot be dealt with adequately here. Briefly, it was a reaction against the scientific materialism of the previous age and an enthusiastic response to a series of new theories which had important literary and philosophical consequences. The variety of "vitalist" responses had common sources, most notably in the writing of Schopenhauer. As Charles Taylor points out: "The idea of nature as a great reservoir of amoral force, with which we must not lose contact, was one of the important bequests of the post-Schopenhauerian period to twentieth-century art and sensibility".[8] The concept of an amoral life force, which acquired further evolutionary overtones, emerged through two important voices during the early years of the twentieth century: Nietzsche and Bergson. It was A.R. Orage's paper, *The New Age*, which became the most important disseminator of Nietzschean and Bergsonian vitalism.[9] Indeed, Nietzsche became "the philosopher *à la mode* in England between 1909 and 1913".[10] In conjunction with philosophy, topical theories of evolution referred to "a single, all-pervading, all-controlling evolutionary will, life force, or *élan vital*".[11] "Vitalism" was taken up by a

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[6]Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament: 1895-1915* (Ohio: Ohio UP, 1986), p. 74.

[7]Richard Aldington, *Life for Life's Sake* (New York: Viking Press, 1941), p. 117.

[8]Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 445.

[9]For more information on this fascinating journal, see Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage: Chapters in Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1967) and Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Art Club 1893-1939*, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990).

[10]David S.Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914: The Growth of a Reputation* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 42.

[11]Tom Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel: Studies in English Literary Criticism and Ideas 1880-1920* (Nedlands: U. of Western Australia, 1973), p. 5.

range of writers and thinkers, from H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw[12] to, most notoriously, D.H. Lawrence; and from William James to the important Edwardian sexologists, Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. Most significant in the context of this study, is the emphasis on vitalism associated with the body itself. Nietzsche was a key exponent of this, emphasising "the dominance of the physical and instinctive and [of] the derivative and instrumental character of whatever is conscious".[13]

The three essays West published in 1913 could be seen as "vitalist" essays, combining to extraordinary effect a variety of threads of contemporary "vitalist" discourse and making clear the links between feminism and the avant-garde. All three essays are saturated with a "vitalist" vocabulary. In "Trees of Gold", the narrator, consumed by a passion of rage, flings herself off to Spain where she is overcome by the beauty and rawness of the landscape which is emblematic of "life". She writes: "This really was an important occasion in my life: before I had always *worshipped* this *violent* and *courageous* beauty which I had never found in people and rarely in art, without any certainty that it existed" (my italics). In "Nana", the narrator is overwhelmed by the vitality of the people of Seville where she finds animation throbbing through the bodies of the inhabitants who have "an insatiable appetite for physical vigour". The dancers in the rather disreputable bar seem to have "caught passion from the universe", making the audience "live wonderfully". In "At Valladolid", the narrator is impressed by the vitality of the girl who leads her to the doctor, "her plumpness was so obviously coursing with quick blood" and the narrative turns around the central concept that "Life has planted itself in all our nerves; we can't root it up".

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[12]George Bernard Shaw also has associations with the Edwardian "cult of life", but David S. Thatcher in *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914* points out that Shaw's theory of the life-force comes from Ibsen rather than Nietzsche. "Back to Nature" movements had been popular since the 1870s. The Fabian society began as "The Fellowship of the New Life" before splintering into political and non-political groups.

[13]Colin Milton, *Nietzsche and Lawrence: A Study in Influence* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 161.

"Trees of Gold" offers overt comment and criticism on attitudes towards suffragism, and it covertly celebrates the verve and energy of the movement. The appetite for life West observes in the Spaniards is also evident in the women who support feminism. In an earlier article, West recalls walking to the end of Regent Street where "I bought a copy of the *Suffragette* from a cold and tired and gallant seller. It struck me, on the way home as I read the announcement of the deputation of working women who are going to St Stephen's when Parliament reassembles after the New Year, that this was the true festive spirit. The excellent thing about the suffrage movement is its insatiable appetite for life".[14] The disgust which is also articulated in "Trees of Gold" is directed at the treatment of this vital source: "but it has suddenly come about that England is no place for a respectable virgin martyr; It blunts the fine edge of the sword of the soul to live in a peace maintained by the torture of women". The narrator herself exudes the energy and desire she describes as characteristic of the feminist movement. Finding herself gazed at as if she were "a rebellious chocolate-cream" by some bewildered male passengers to whom she had declared that she desired the vote, the narrator goes on to state that "I was not a luxury but a journalist". Claiming for herself a role and a profession, West also satirises a contemporary view of women, as consumable and disposable, mere accessories.

But West's celebration of the appetite and verve characteristic of the feminist movement also takes on a different line of "vitalist" theory which ultimately clashes with mainstream suffragist thinking. The WSPU's foregrounding of the female body in public marches and pageantry in order to invade male space was concurrent with its emphasis on control and discipline over the body. As Janet Lyon points out: "Control of the body - the code of this new order - everywhere patterns the discursive fabric of militancy. Sexual self-

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[14]"Christmas Shopping", *The Clarion* 27 December 1912, *YRB*, p. 137.

control defines new Women and New Men of England; oral control steels the hunger-striking Suffragettes bound to silence by prison rules; military control galvanizes the Bodyguard as they receive the truncheon blows meant for Emmeline Pankhurst".[15] West's depiction of appetite and vigour draws on a discourse of "vitalism" that challenges the doctrine of control.

The vocabulary of "passion", "consumption", "fierce splendour" and so on is a Nietzschean one, drawn from West's own reading and appropriation of Nietzschean thought and that of Dora Marsden's, evident in the editorials of her paper.[16] It is more than likely that West first discovered Nietzsche through *The New Age.* Her acknowledgement of the significance of this paper in contributing to her early education is very important. In a 1912 review she wrote with reference to her reading of modern literature during religious classes at school: "Brute force was what we loved. Kipling was our favourite author, the *New Age* our only paper, and Stephen Phillips our favourite poet".[17] Some years later, West acknowledged another important debt to *The New Age.* In a letter written in 1917 to Arnold Bennett, West says: "I was for two years forced by a benevolent government to attend a cookery class every Friday afternoon, and it was my habit to make these hours that would otherwise have been unprofitable more valuable than the rest of my education put together by reading Jacob Tonson...".[18] As an avid reader of *The New Age* from early in her career, West and other readers and writers imbibed the newest and latest ideas. Anthony West (the

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[15]Lyon, p. 120. This is an extremely useful essay in its discussion of the correlation between the avant-garde and the suffragette movement.

[16]West refers to Nietzsche in "The Sentinel" (S, **p. 16**, Book II, I, 33) and in an article published in 1912, she quotes from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* ("The Gospel According to Mrs Humphry Ward", *The Freewoman* 15 February 1912). There are several more references to Nietzsche in her early journalism.

[17]*The Freewoman* 5 September, 1912, p. 306.

[18]Qtd. in Wallace Martin, p. 95. Jacob Tonson was Bennett's pen-name as a columnist for *The New Age.* West's acknowledged debt provides an important contrast with many of the stringent attacks she made on Bennett's work in literary reviews. Although she remained hostile towards his fiction, she was always ready to recognise what was valuable in his writing, particularly in his criticism. After his death, she wrote: "Arnold Bennett was indubitably great. I do not mean that he was a great writer, for about that, owing to the peculiar circumstances of his literary career, it is not easy to be sure. But as a character in a novel written by a great writer at his best was great, so was Arnold Bennett" (*Arnold Bennett By Himself*, New York: The John Day Company, 1931), p. 5.

son of West and H.G. Wells) makes an interesting observation in this regard:

> The young heroes like Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis whom my mother was meeting under Ford and Violet's roof at South Lodge, were full of talk of the "morals of masters", the "moral freedom of the Übermensch" and of the necessity for rejecting slave ethics of Christianity, particularly in that degenerate form they had assumed as part of the ideology of secular humanism. Although the language that Nietzsche addressed to his audience in his day can now be recognised at first glance in the rhetoric of proto-fascism, my mother, like many others in her age group, was badly taken in by its false vigor and was soon, despite her reservations about his antifeminism, adapting his tropes for her own purposes.[19]

West's adaptation of Nietzschean tropes was not unusual among certain feminist thinkers and writers of the day. May Sinclair in a pamphlet entitled "Feminism" adopts the language of "vitalism" with its Nietzschean resonances as a way of empowering women: "There is everything in those profound and intarissable (sic) wells of instinct, in that stream of the Life-Force of which Woman is pre-eminently the reservoir".[20] Dora Marsden, whose writing certainly inspired and influenced the young Rebecca West,[21] appropriated to an extraordinary degree the ideas of several male philosophers. Marsden was strongly influenced by the German philosopher Max Stirner, as well as Nietzsche, Weininger and the French philosopher Bergson. "While renouncing the rapid misogyny of the German philosopher Nietzsche, Dora would have appreciated his passionate individualism and his hatred of democracy of equals".[22] In many of her editorials, Marsden uses a vitalist vocabulary with Nietzschean overtones as part of her doctrine of feminist self-realisation. The need for passion, the craving for beauty and the necessity for sense-gratification echo

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[19]Anthony West, "Mother and Son", *New York Review of Books* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1 March, 1984, p. 11. It is important to register here the hostility between West and her son, evident in this, nonetheless useful quotation.

[20]May Sinclair, *Feminism*, (London: The Woman Writer's Suffrage League, 1912), p. 30.

[21]Robin Hicks in her M.Litt dissertation makes this point persuasively at several points (see, for example, pages 15, 28 and 73) and West's letters to Marsden at this time provide their own evidence: "You wonderful person - you not only write those wonderful front pages, but you inspire other people to write wonderfully" (West, letter to Marsden, June 1912, Dora Marsden Collection, Princeton University).

[22]Garner, *Dora Marsden*, p. 144.

through her writing. She declares in her editorial "The New Morality" that: "Seeking the realisation of the will of others and not their own, ever waiting upon the minds of others, woman have almost lost the instinct for self-realisation, the instinct for achievement in their own persona".[23]

In one way, West's three Spanish essays reveal her own process of self-realisation, her own pursuit of the "life-force", discovered in a different landscape and through the vital bodies of very different kinds of women. Evidence of West's engagement with the multifaceted doctrine of "vitalism" comes not only from her Spanish essays, but also from her book reviews. In "Two Poets", West refers to "the lovely breathing body of life"[24] and in "The Belief in Personal Immortality" she writes: "What men have thought of as the soul is the excitement that grows like a flower from a healthy body jewelled with fine nerves: what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses the power of ecstasy?".[25] Ecstasy and "the lovely breathing body of life" were to be found in the unlikely figure West refers to as Nana, a voluptuous stripper in a downtown Seville bar.

"Nana" is striking for a number of reasons. In true *Freewoman* and Westian fashion, the essay creates a series of shocks - the discovery of the "life-force" in a group of dancers who are also probably strippers or prostitutes, described as "a band of holy women set apart"; the approximation made between these women and an animal vitality where at one point, the feet of the dancers "looked like delicate hoofs" and most significantly, where the parallel is drawn between Nana and the powerful body of a horse. In addition to this, the essay is scattered with energetic and suggestive references to body parts - - quite literally in the reference to a Spanish article about the military gentleman who had "invited his daughter's

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[23] *The Freewoman*, 14 December, 1911, p. 62.
[24] *The Freewoman*, 9 May, 1912, p. 488.
[25] *The Freewoman*, 15 July, 1913, p. 46.

lover to tea and after dividing him into manageable joints had walled him up in the drawing-room", and in the song about Mariquita who had been buried in "a big black box". These references build up, by contrast, to a revelation of wholeness and vitality in the dancer and stripper, Nana, "the woman of their worship and of mine". West's naming of her character Nana is an overt allusion to Zola's Nana too, the seductive and corrupting heroine of that eponymous novel, although the narrator makes it clear that this is Nana with a difference.[26] In discovering her, the narrator wearily wishes to "rub my tired face against the smooth down of her shoulders as though I was a child". Conflating the protective and nurturing connotations of a childhood nurse with the overt sexuality of the stripper is provocative, effectively evoking a female vitality which is a combination of traditionally divided attributes, the sexual and the maternal. "Indeed, it was from this blending of her vitality with the liberal contemplation of country matters that sprung her Nanahood, as plump strawberries lie on good earth and dung". Nana's body is a revitalising revelation, restoring life and sensibility to the narrator's sense of her own body and inspiring her artistic impulses. In one way, West's "Nana experience" is an enactment of Dora Marsden's philosophy of the senses.[27] Accompanying her invocations of the life-force, Marsden emphasises the importance of sensory perception and experience, in opposition to the ascetism advocated both by anti-feminists and by certain wings of the feminist movements. When women's five senses have been deadened, they are "cut off from sense and pleasure, from experience and expression, from the intense sense perception, and the gratification of desire; all, according

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[26]Significantly too, Nana is a manifestation of the narrator's "dreams of a Godiva", "a virgin of the mountains who should perceive the loveliness of her body to be an incarnation of the divine principle come to earth to convert men to beauty". Drawing on legend and history in Britain, West recalls and reinvents the possibilities for female power. See Marina Warner's *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 307-310.

[27]Carol Barash usefully discusses Marsden's Nietzschean discourse and her influence on West: "West's fiction and reviews similarly reject women's self-denial in favor of the symbolism of individual desire" (Barash, p. 47).

to Marsden, vital to achievement and creativity".[28] For the narrator in West's essay, the dance and nakedness of Nana is a type of epiphany:

> This was inspired nakedness. As the gaslight glowed off her body, whose wholesomeness immediately frustrated her attempt at indecency, and the lines of her trembled because she continued to sing deeply from the chest, I remembered how I once saw the sun beating on the great marbled loins and furrowed back of a grey Clydesdale and watched the backward thrust of its thigh twitch with power.

The comparison made here emphasises not merely regenerative qualities but power and vitality. What is significant is that West's worship of "refreshing flesh and blood", is channelled through a conventionally "fallen woman". The life force arises out of pure physical beauty and power, disregarding all moral and social sanctions.

An objection might be made that in this passage, West refuses to consider the position of the Nana figure as the exploited object of male desire and spectatorship.[29] But the narrator consciously distances herself from the male perspective while at the same time participating in it: "At my applause the men beside me turned smiling faces to offer friendship that could have been worth nothing, being based on a misunderstanding". In a similar way, West both aligns and differentiates herself from the literary origin of the stripper, Zola's *Nana*:

> Muffat suivait ce profil si tendre, ces fuites de chair blonde se noyant dans des lueurs dorées, ces rondeurs où la flamme des bougies mettait des reflets de soie. Il songeait à son ancienne horreur de la femme, au monstre de l'Ecriture, lubrique, sentant le fauve. Nana était toute velue, un duvet de rousse faisait de son corps un velour; tandis que, dans sa croupe et ses cuisses de cavale, dans les renflements charnus creusés de plis profonds, qui donnaient le sexe le voile troublant de leur combre, il y avait de la bête.[30]

In a way which anticipates her rereading of Titian in *Henry James* and which was to become a characteristic of her writing throughout her career, West's literary debts often expose

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[28]Hicks, p. 152.

[29]For more on this perspective, see: Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and Frances Bonner et al. eds., *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

[30]Emile Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), pp. 216-217.

misogyny but also possibilities for its re-appropriation and re-reading. In Zola's novel, Nana's sensuousness turns out to be dangerous and destructive, her animal vitality is rotten and corrupting. In this essay, West retrieves Nana's vitality, conferring on it a different set of meanings. What the female spectator derives from gazing at the naked Nana figure in the essay is quite different from the male audience's response, for they merely gain erotic satisfaction. For the narrator, it is the eroticism of life itself, which restores her sense of self.

West defends and critically utilises her celebration of female nudity in other passages from her journalism too. In an article, "Much Worse than Gaby Deslys: A Plea for Decency", West criticises conventional morality, perpetuated by men. In this essay, the beauty of the infamous Deslys[31] is evoked as "a moral tonic".[32] The near nudity of a healthy, beautiful woman is, as West points out, not nearly as shocking as near nudity due to poverty. And poverty is a much more severe moral deprivation than an exposure of human flesh: "The Bishop is shocked at the idea of one healthy and well-nourished young woman voluntarily assuming becoming and comfortable scanty garments. I am shocked at the idea of five ill-fed and ill-housed people compelled by society to wear unbecoming and scanty garments".[33]

West tackles the issue of clothing, the female body and morality from another angle in an article written for *The Clarion*: "The social liberty of a respectable woman is circumscribed by the vices of men ... There is even an idea that women should regulate their dress according to men's lack of self-control rather than their own comfort".[34] West here criticises the idea that women's bodies should be controlled and constructed according to the

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[31]Cecil Beaton's description of this figure is instructive: "Gaby Deslys was something of a key transitional figure - the successor to the grand Parisian *cocottes* of the nineties on the one hand, and, since she was a theatrical figure, the precursor of a whole school of glamour that was to be exemplified twenty years later by the Marlene Dietrich of the Cinema screen". Cecil Beaton, *The Glass of Fashion* (London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1954), p. 38.

[32]*The Clarion* 28 November 1913, *YRB*, p. 229.

[33]*YRB*, p. 230.

[34]"An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty", *The Clarion* 27 September 1912, *YRB*, pp. 100-101.

vicious desires of men. Autonomy and independence are required instead. West returns to this issue again and again in her journalism. In an article, "On Mentioning the Unmentionable", she challenges laws which ostensibly protect women by removing from them all moral responsibility, and thus autonomy.

> We know quite well that the average girl of nineteen or twenty is, unless she is feeble-minded, perfectly able to look after herself. To make her irresponsible concerning the disposal of her body fosters an undignified and sneakish sense of irresponsibility in her own mind, encourages her parents to keep her ignorant, and puts an unfair amount of responsibility on men.[35]

Thus, the near nudity of Gaby Deslys or of the Spanish dancer need not express her exploitation, but rather her self-confidence and self-expression. Certainly, "Nana" is regenerative in her uplifting effect on the weary narrator, as is the female presence in "At Valladolid". But the focus on the sensuous female physique is more than a traditional image of the maternal and regenerative woman. Through these figures, West also challenges the construction of women's bodies exclusively through male eyes. Adela's (in *Adela*) almost masculine virility subverts female stereotypes, the fallen woman becomes a Nana figure who secures and inspires, and the cabaret dancer who outrages the clergy can be seen as a moral presence in the light of comparable social outrages. The female body as pure body, in West's early short stories and articles, is a source of "life" and also a source of revelation of social and moral inequalities.

Imaging Vitalism and Feminism

Paradoxically, this celebration of feminist power through the body was antithetical to the practioners of avant-garde ideas, with whom West became briefly involved through Dora Marsden's journal. In April 1912, *The Freewoman* published an article on a Futurist

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[35] *The Clarion* September 26, 1913, *YRB*, p. 202.

exhibition held in London, an exhibition which "brought Futurism squarely before the popular press - which, sensing Futurism's growing cultural capital, quickly appended the term 'futurist' to all avant-garde art, and anything else that was quirky, trendy, or inscrutably modern".[36] The appearance of the Italian Futurists in London had a strong impact on figures such as Lewis, Pound and their avant-garde associates. Most important, in this context, was the Futurist emphasis on energy, modernity and aggression. Peter Nicholls points out that "Key ideas of dynamism and flux ... were drawn from Nietzsche and Bergson".[37] The celebration of modernity included an embracing of the city and all its modern attributes and associations with the machine age. The Vorticists also celebrated the conjunction of energy and modernity. Shared by these various groups was a scorn for the feminine. The misogyny of the Futurists and of the later Vorticists is well-known, and yet, as Lyon demonstrates, there is a curious, although always ambiguous, endorsement of feminism evident in Futurist and Vorticist manifestos:

> Marinetti's ambivalence about women and suffragism was hardly unique among avant-gardists, or within the revolutionary/avant-garde tradition for that matter. While individual artists and writers like Nevinson, Hulme, and Gaudier-Brzeska may have eschewed the "feminine" and called for "virility," "hardness," and "masculine precision" in their new abstract art, nearly all of them benefitted directly from the patronage of "emancipated" women and many of them supported women's suffrage.[38]

The contradictory aspects of avant-garde ideas emerging at the time would not have been antithetical to *The Freewoman's* editorial policy, and thus, articles on Futurist exhibitions and other avant-garde aims and activities were welcomed. At the same time, the earliest conception of "imagisme" was given a voice in 1913. In March 1913, two essays appeared in *Poetry*, "one by Flint, entitled 'Imagisme', and the other by Pound, called 'A Few Don'ts

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[36]Lyon, p. 104.
[37]Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 84.
[38]Lyon, p. 106.

by an Imagist'. These essays represented the first serious attempt at a statement of Imagist principles".[39] Poetry written by Richard Aldington and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and later the early poetry of T.S. Eliot was included in this "school of Images". What "Imagisme" is or was is still open to debate, but it can be generally described as promoting a doctrine of hardness and concentration.[40] Intensity was to be achieved through the image which was "a moment of revealed truth, rather than a structure of consecutive events or thoughts".[41] For T.E. Hulme, "It is the visual content of language ... which makes it communicative"[42] and Pound suggested that the image is not to be used as an ornament but that "The image is itself the speech".[43] Rebecca West was not a poet, but her obvious interest in and knowledge of this new school of poetry is illustrated in a preface she wrote for *The New Freewoman* in 1913, soon after the publication of her Spanish essays. This preface introduced F.S. Flint's essay on imagisme (previously published in *Poetry*), which was reproduced and then followed by some poems written by Ezra Pound. There are striking similarities between the Spanish essays, the preface and Flint's declarations. As Rebecca West understood Flint's manifesto: "Poetry should be burned to the bone by austere fires and washed white with rains of affliction: the poet should love nakedness and the thought of the skeleton under the flesh". In addition to this, West states that: "the imagistes want to discover the most puissant way of whirling the scattered star dust of words into a new star of passion".[44] It is important to consider West's use of language in her essays and later in "Indissoluble Matrimony" in the light of avant-garde doctrine, whilst being aware of the difficulties of discussing theories intended for one genre in terms of another. It is also important to note that West would not

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[39]William Pratt, ed., *the imagiste poem*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1963), p. 17.

[40]See Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms* and Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism* for more detailed accounts.

[41]Pratt, p. 29.

[42]Pratt, p. 28

[43]Ezra Pound, "Vorticism", *Fortnightly Review* XCVI, 1 September 1914, p. 469.

[44]"Imagisme", *The New Freewoman* August 15th, 1913, p. 86.

have considered herself a member of any of these new schools of thought. Her reservations are as evident as her interest. In a letter to Dora Marsden she writes: "We were glad to give hospitality in our pages to the exposition and examples of imagism because it seemed to us an interesting technical experiment. But *The New Freewoman* is not to be identified with its precepts".[45]

West's evocations of a pure and purifying poetry burned by "austere fires" and "washed white" by affliction are already evident in her "Trees of Gold" essay. Here, the vitalist doctrine of passion and sensuousness is expressed throughout by images of fire, burning and consumption. The Spanish landscape, touched "by some deep passion" is scorched, ravaged, filled with "burnt green trees" and cliffs, "stripped and shining". The landscape becomes for the narrator a perfect epiphanic image of a dangerous beauty which must be embraced, a beauty bought at the cost of "rashness and cruelty". The imagery becomes more refined and purified as the essay proceeds; the landscape is reduced metonymically to the trees of gold, specifically in relation to the cross of Christ and the Freewoman doctrine, that self-sacrifice is sinful.[46] The "trees of gold" whose trunks "were the glowing metal itself" are denaturalized by a "precise, elemental language",[47] rendering "a moment of revealed truth" concerning the aesthetics of beauty and pain that West is exploring. West concentrates and intensifies her own doctrine of vitalism, within a paradoxically hardened and denaturalized image. In a similar, and perhaps even more

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[45]West to Marsden, n.d., Dora Marsden Collection, Princeton.

[46]West's anti-Christian declarations have Nietzschean overtones. They are also reminiscent of Dora Marsden's theory about "the moral development of the individual, Nietzschean woman", and the need for rejecting "women's self-denial in favor of the symbolism of individual desire" (Barash, p. 46-47). West wrote numerous articles which criticised the equation between "woman" and self-sacrifice: "Anti-feminists, from Chesterton down to Dr Lionel Tayler (sic), want women to specialise in virtue. While men are rolling round the world having murderous and otherwise sinful adventures of an enjoyable nature, in commerce, exploration or art, women are to stay at home earning the promotion of the human race to a better world" ("A New Woman's Movement", *The Clarion* 20 December 1912, *YRB*, p. 132). See also "The Sin of Self-Sacrifice", *The Clarion* 12 December 1913, *YRB*), pp. 235-238.

[47]Barash, p. 49.

startling fashion, West evokes the vitality of Nana in her second essay:

> I love shiny things: the glossy tiles in the corridors of the tubes, the gleam of the water as it slides to the weir, well-polished boots. So I love this lady. In all directions she presented smooth white surfaces and pleasant bulges; her hair rose from bright low forehead like a solid and newly-blackleaded iron fender; her shoulders beamed like a newly-enamelled bath.

Transforming Nana's voluptuous curves into polished surfaces and hard edges, her vitality is captured in contradictory images of the modern and the domestic. Not only do these extraordinarily modern, even futurist images anticipate the preoccupations of the short-lived Vorticist movement, but her allusion to "a new star of passion"[48] in the preface to Flint's essay also anticipates the later Vorticist emphasis on pattern and energy.

> The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can , and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name 'vorticism'.[49]

West's experiments with new concepts and new images combine with an exploration of contemporary versions of vitalism out of which she creates her own feminist vision. Her fictionalised version of this vision, "Indissoluble Matrimony" and its appearance in the first volume of the Vorticist journal, *Blast*, is thus neither surprising nor inappropriate.[50]

"Indissoluble Matrimony", Vorticism and the "Men of 1914"

West's first published short story is a satire about an unhappily married couple whose antagonism escalates into a literal sex-war. Evadne, the sensuous wife with socialist and

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[48]West utilises the image of "a new star" in a different but highly significant way in her first essay, "Trees of Gold". Attacking the cult of self-sacrifice and the "desire to the save the world", she swings her attention briefly towards contemporary literature, noting, several years before Virginia Woolf's famous attack on the Edwardian Uncles (See "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and "Modern Fiction"), that: "Our writers totter into sociology to tidy things up, and benevolently design new and improved workhouse dietaries instead of new stars".

[49]Ezra Pound, "Vorticism", pp. 469-470.

[50]Much critical opinion has found it surprising that she published it there, although Bonnie Kime Scott notes that "The story was a good fit for vorticism, though it introduced several feminist twists to the male-inspired figuration" (*Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 1, p. 107).

intellectual aspirations is the antithesis and object of hatred of her husband who is a Leonard Bast-type figure without any of Bast's redeeming characteristics. As a literary piece, "Indissoluble Matrimony" is mentioned but considered in little detail by many critics who have commented on other contributors to *Blast*, such as Ford Madox Ford, Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. Richard Aldington's positive assessment of it is one of the few written by her own contemporaries: "The first number of *Blast* was indeed a brilliant production, but most of the brilliance was due to the editor and chief contributor, P. Wyndham Lewis, and to a short story which I think one of the best ever produced by that gifted writer Rebecca West".[51] The response of A. R. Orage in *The New Age* is more typical of both contemporary and later criticism. He writes that West's story "has all the vices of the 'Blast' school, excessive and barbaric ornamentation, violent obscurity, degraded imagery; but unmixed with any idea".[52] Predictably, Orage's review of Lewis's *Enemy of the Stars* which appeared alongside West's story, is much more positive. More recently it has been described as a "lurid story of sexual antagonism" by Victoria Glendinning and Gloria Fromm.[53] Feminist critics have taken the story more seriously and it has been included in *The Norton Anthology of Literature By Women*.[54] It has been read as a prototype for West's *Harriet Hume* and as a Lawrentian tale;[55] and it has also been described as "a feminine vision that went beyond the violent, surface articulations of *Blast* editor, Wyndham Lewis, and the aestheticized violence of vorticism".[56] This "feminine vision" will be considered below. Maggie Humm suggests that the story could be read "as a key modernist step from James to D.H. Lawrence's

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[51]Richard Aldington, *Life for Life's Sake*, p. 126.
[52]"Readers and Writers" July 16, 1914, p. 253.
[53]Glendinning, p. 39.
[54]Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Literature By Women* (New York: Norton, 1985).
[55]Kime Scott, "The Strange Necessity of Rebecca West", p. 279.
[56]Kime Scott, "Refiguring the Binary, Breaking the Cycle: Rebecca West as Feminist Modernist", in *Twentieth Century Novel* Vol 37. No. 2 (Summer 1991), p. 185.

association of the psyche and nature" seeing it as a story which "encapsulates all the themes of Rebecca West's later career of criticism".[57] Jane Marcus has also identified links between West and Lawrence in this story, observing that West is writing in "the psychological tradition of Lawrence and the Brontes".[58] It is read by Gilbert and Gubar as a significant "tale of sexual battle" and their analysis of the text offers some very useful insights into reading West as an early female modernist, too:

> for feminist modernists "Indissoluble Matrimony" might have functioned as a witty exploration of the dynamics of sex antagonism, a paradigmatic (female) joke about the neurotic never-never-land inhabited by the lost boys who became the early twentieth century's no-men.[59]

Their analysis which interprets George Silverton as an early "miserably wedded and unhappily bedded J. Alfred Prufrock" and an example of "male hysteria", "the symptom of masculine cultural enervation" is a useful one, highlighting West's always sensitive and alert responses to her own times.[60] As an approach, it suggests something prophetic in West's portrayal of the emasculated George, and whilst his powerlessness is a source of humour and mockery in this story, he partly foreshadows the shell-shocked and hopeless hero of *The Return of the Soldier*, a tragic and moving figure. Longenbach also places the story within a war context, noting that it was written, "As if in response to Lewis's shortsighted dismissal of female power".[61] Stephen Kern alludes briefly but usefully to the story, seeing it "as a story of deficient love in conflict, fought out in the water, and in the fight for the first time

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[57]Maggie Humm, *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics* (London: The Harvester Press, 1986), p. 175.

[58]*YRB*, p. 266.

[59]Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 97.

[60]Gilbert and Gubar, p. 97.

[61]James Longenbach, "The Women and Men of 1914" in *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation*, ed. Helen M. Cooper et al., (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 99.

in literature, a woman possesses superior skill and outmaneuvers a man".[62]

In addition to the dissenting views of critics on the literary value of the story, there are a number of conflicting accounts as to when it was written and why the story appeared in *Blast* at all. Victoria Glendinning has suggested that it was begun much earlier than 1914 and that it was turned down by the *English Review* and the *Blue Review* first.[63] Jeffrey Meyers has a different version, suggesting that:

> Lewis admired West's articles in the *New Freewoman* and invited her to contribute to the first number of *Blast.* She wrote unusually perceptive critiques of *Tarr* and *Paleface*, and Lewis called her the best reviewer in contemporary England.[64]

This is a view corroborated by Richard Cork who notes that in a 1971 interview, West said she had been invited to participate "because Lewis had met me at South Lodge and liked some things of mine in *The New Freewoman*.[65] West had provided a variation on this version some years earlier, explaining in a letter to William Troy in 1930 that it was a teenage story which Wyndham Lewis had found at "South Lodge" and then published (Beineke Library, Yale University). Violet Hunt had yet another version and one that is instructive for reading the story. In her memoirs, *The Flurried Years*, she wrote:

> And I was instrumental in procuring for its pages [*Blast*] the first short story of a young lady since better known. Rebecca West in her teens, with her tongue in her cheek, taking up the whole problem of man's life and making a delectable joke and parody of it! Good Spoof, indeed, but the public did not see it and, to her chagrin, insisted on regarding "Indissoluble Matrimony" as a tragic experiment. Vehemently she protested against this attitude of the critics. In writing of the attempted suicide of the egregious Evadne,[66] "I was only," she said, "meaning to write a funny story about what were perfectly

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[62]Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns* (Cambridge, Mass.,: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 75.

[63]Glendinning, p. 39.

[64]Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 31.

[65]Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (London: G. Fraser, 1976), pp. 242-243.

[66]Violet Hunt was notorious for getting things wrong. West refers to this characteristic in a memoir as "Violet petals". Evadne does not try to commit suicide; her husband does, unsuccessfully.

> horrible situations". "Indissoluble Matrimony" is a Conte de Hoffmann, or a tale by the author of "The Diamond Lens," and reviewers took it as if it were a novel by Mrs. Mona Caird or Madame Marie Stopes.[67]

Hunt's emphasis on the comic element in the story is informative. The tone of the story is complex and the narrative perspective shifts from an authorial standpoint to George Silverton's jaundiced point-of-view, from comic melodrama to a more serious comment on antagonism between the sexes. The attempt to create an ambiguous narrative perspective is probably a consequence of West's associations with Ford Madox Ford and, vicariously, with Joseph Conrad. In addition to this, she was intensely interested in the novels of Henry James at this time, culminating in her critical study of his work in 1916.

Another, perhaps more reliable way of dating the story involves the pages of *The Freewoman*. Dora Marsden wrote a series of editorials entitled "The New Morality". The editorial for January 4, 1912 dealt with limitations imposed on people by "Indissoluble Monogamy" where "monogamy has maintained itself by means of the support of men's hypocrisy, the spinsters' dumb resignation, the prostitutes' unsightly degradation, and the married women's monopoly and satisfaction" (p. 121). West's short story title is directly derived from Marsden's editorial, as is the theme. Robin Hicks also points to Marsden's influence here:

> Marsden's emphasis on the individuality of passion and sex-love, as well as her discussions on individual standards, provided the foundation for her denunciation of the hypocritical sexual contract, the false monogamy of 'the old morality'. This analysis very likely influenced Rebecca West's short story, "Indissoluble Matrimony", one of the few contributions by a woman published in *Blast*, a vehicle for "the men of 1914".[68]

Thus the writing of the story can be dated between January 1912 and June 1914 (see Chapter One, p. 29), perhaps written during the same period as the Spanish essays. All of these

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[67]Hunt, *The Flurried Years*, p. 217.
[68]Hicks, p. 159.

various interpretations and possible dates offer some useful insights. The feminist sources of the story are obvious and they both clash with and coincide with Vorticist declarations in *Blast*. Violet Hunt's rather elaborate explanation still suggests one of the most important ways the story needs to be understood. It is a satire on misogyny, on the institution of marriage and possibly on aspects of early feminism too. In addition, despite its theme and its presentation, Lewis deemed the story suitable to join a collection of work by a group of important artists:

> writers (Richard Aldington, T.S. Eliot, Rebecca West, and Pound); painters (Frederick Etchells, Vasili Kandinsky, and Lewis); and sculptors (Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska). Needless to say, these people have had something to do with the smashing of older icons and traditions.[69]

Thus, "Indissoluble Matrimony" requires an approach from two different and yet connected perspectives - aesthetics and sexual politics. Both the Suffrage Movement and the Vorticist Movement aimed to change society. The suffragettes were looking for votes for women and equality. In the two issues of *Blast*, the Vorticists expressed their belief in "the desirability of renovating the arts by renovating their society".[70] This paradoxical combination of an apparently male aesthetics (Vorticism) with feminist demands (Suffragism) has been amply demonstrated by Janet Lyon who shows how "the rhetoric and tactics of the militant women's movement were enfolded into the foundations of English modernism, and how, conversely, the closely watched public activities of Futurists and Vorticists in England helped to produce the public identity of the militant suffrage movement".[71] The striking parallels Lyon draws between these two antithetical movements include the use of militant discourse, the rhetoric of contempt and the importance of energy and gender as sites of insurgency.

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[69]Richard G. Landini, "Vorticism and *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound", *The Western Humanities Review* Vol. 14, No. 2. (1960), p. 174.

[70]Landini, p. 178.

[71]Lyon, p. 102. Lyon has emphasised "the predatory relation between the English avant-garde and the English Suffragette movement" (p. 122).

Such meeting points between the avant-garde and the feminist movement are vividly illustrated in "Indissoluble Matrimony".

Blast, the short-lived literary journal edited by Wyndham Lewis, burst onto the English literary scene in 1914, with a series of "blastings" and "blessings" of various aspects of the establishment (including a blessing, laced with satire, of the suffragettes), accompanied by short stories, poetry and prints. Included with West's short story in volume one was an extract from Ford Madox Ford's, *The Good Soldier*. The aesthetic ideas behind the journal were still evolving and the label of "Vorticism" was applied only after the first volume had been put together.[72] As a movement, it represented both a response to and reaction against Italian Futurism, a reaction against Bloomsbury and a space in which Ezra Pound could advance his own theories on "Imagisme". Meyers's definition is instructive:

> Vorticism tried to synthesize the innovative and iconoclastic aspects of Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Imagism, Cubism, Futurism and abstract painting; was influenced by the theories of T.E. Hulme, who emphasized the importance of African and Polynesian sculpture and praised hard, angular, geometric art; combined primitivism and technology; was fascinated with machinery, the city, energy and violence; was characterized by dissonance and asymmetry, iron control and underlying explosiveness, classical detachment and strident energy.[73]

West's links with the "imagistes" and the impending "Vorticists" are immediately discernible in a comparison of Evadne with her predecessor.[74] Like Adela, she is an example of one of West's sensuous women, but what has altered here is the way in which the body is

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[72]"Only in May or June 1914 did Pound and Lewis come up with that new word, *Vorticism*, to describe their own art in contradistinction to the other isms of modern art, Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and Imagism" (Reed Way Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 14. See also Timothy Materer, *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, Lewis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) and Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era:The Age of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972).

[73]Meyers, p. 63.

[74]West did not, however, take her association with Vorticism completely seriously. She reports in a letter of 1915 that "I have just seen about *Blast* in *The Times Literary Supplement*. It is described as a Manifesto of the Vorticists. Am I a Vorticist? I am sure it can't be good for Anthony (her young son) if I am" (H.G. Wells Collection, Boston University). My thanks to Bonnie Kime Scott for showing me this material.

evoked. Instead of simply describing Adela's sensuous presence with a string of adjectives, West chooses to condense and contain this exuberance in her use of the image. If, for the imagiste, the image is a moment of revealed truth, the presentation of the bowl of fruit in this story functions in a similar way. From the very beginning, Evadne Silverton is associated with images of iridescence and plenitude, her physicality is as luminous as the fruit on the table:

> In the centre, obviously intended as the principal dish, was a bowl of plums, softly red, soaked with the sun, glowing like jewels in the downward stream of the incandescent light. Beside them was a great yellow melon, its sleek sides fluted with rich growth, and a honeycomb glistening on a willow-pattern dish.[75]

Evadne Silverton is the manifestation of West's delight in the "Nana" figure, "in the movement of living things", an intellectualised version of Gaby Deslys "my magnificent straight-backed chorus girl".[76] But she is more than this, too. In "Indissoluble Matrimony", the intellectual woman and the energizing woman are one and the same. Evadne's 2beautiful joyful body2 (IM, p. 268) is figured in the bowl of fruit, its fleshiness saturated with light and colour. This sensual figuring is continued in Evadne's "*crushing* honey on new bread, or *stripping* a plum of its purple skin and holding the golden globe up to the gas to see the light filter through" (IM, p. 268), (My italics). Evadne's sensuous enjoyment of her meal is emblematic of her frank sexuality, everything that her husband finds repugnant. The image of the fruit contains not only the idea of the modern sexual woman, but also the naturalness of such a concept. West, who had already satirized male prudery and stereotyping in articles such as "Much Worse than Gaby Deslys", criticises the same features in George, who shrinks from Evadne's physical frankness, accusing her of moral laxity: "I didn't know women were

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[75]IM, p. 268. References to "Indissoluble Matrimony" (IM) are taken from Jane Marcus's *The Young Rebecca.*.

[76]*YRB*, p. 227.

like that" (IM, p. 273). Evadne's timid offer of "an enormous slice of melon" (IM, p. 268) is predictably refused by her husband. Maggie Humm's discussion of West's use of sexual metaphor is revealing here: "What is dramatic about West is that she is a woman critic using sexual metaphors against men to reveal their sex-antagonism to women".[77]

Thus, the image of the light-saturated fruit sets up both aesthetic and "feminist" paradigms within the story. The image is also indicative of West's sharpened and more concentrated use of language here. Images of light and dark are employed not only to create certain perspectives about the central protagonists, but also to convey the growing distortion of George Silverton's perceptions of his wife. His outburst of hatred for Evadne is prompted by the discovery that she is to be a speaker at a socialist meeting. Evadne is not only provocative in her sensuality, but also in her successful intellectual preoccupations. The enlightened woman becomes for George like one of Wyndham Lewis's "Grotesques", figured in black and white "like a grotesquely patterned wild animal" (IM, p. 277). The various "transformations" the figure of Evadne undergoes in the story, in relation to the changing landscape and to George's perceptions of her, are rooted in contemporary debates about women and femininity, and rendered in a style appropriate to the Vorticist aesthetic.

Lisa Tickner's discussion of contemporary feminist and anti-feminist depictions of women is useful here. Early feminists, having only stereotypes of "woman" to work with, had to rewrite and recreate new types: "Because their exclusion from the franchise was justified primarily on grounds of sex, their counter-meanings had to be mobilised around the redefinition of femininity, or the use of conventional designations (like 'womanliness') in new ways".[78] Such redesignations resulted in a new feminist typology - the working woman, the modern woman, the militant woman and the womanly woman.

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[77]Humm, pp. 166-7.
[78]Tickner, p. 172.

> The working woman offered a class reproach to 'anti' privilege. The modern woman, defined as a progressive social type in language borrowed from social Darwinism, was used to characterise traditional femininity as full of artifice and out-of-date. The womanly woman, a more idealised and nebulous accretion of feminine virtues, was too valuable an identification to concede to the antis, so that it was not 'womanliness' which suffragists attacked but the power to define it.[79]

For the WSPU especially, the militant woman became the embodiment of a new kind of femininity.[80] West's depiction of Evadne in this story seems to embrace all these new types and, at times, the old types as well.[81] In the beginning, Evadne, the sensualist[82] and the whore (in her husband's maddened eyes) is opposed to Evadne the socialist intellectual; the meek, bored housewife becomes the terrifying Amazon fighting for her life, and Evadne the domestic cat becomes the wild animal, just as the suffocating domestic environment is challenged by a liberating, and yet sinister, almost surreal landscape in which a literal battle of the sexes takes place.[83]

The transformations Evadne undergoes are imaged in the transition from the light-soaked fruit to George's "grotesquely patterned animal" and they are also rendered through a series of shifting images of light. George's first glimpse of Evadne is when she is singing and "washed with darkness" (IM, p. 269). The night into which Evadne flees after the argument with George is "flooded with the yellow moonshine of midsummer; it seemed to

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[79]Tickner, p. 173.

[80]Tickner, p. 205.

[81]It is possible that, by naming her heroine Evadne, West is deliberately alluding to a New Woman prototype - Evadne in Sarah Grand's "New Woman" novel, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell, 1893). Evadne in West's short story is essentially the New Woman dressed, albeit briefly, in Vorticist clothes.

[82]Significantly here, Evadne's sensuousness is linked to her musicality: "But then, as it [the song] welled up from the thick golden throat and clung to her lips, it seemed a sublime achievement of the soul" (IM, p. 270). Her voice is one of the first attractions for George and it becomes the source of one of his greatest irritations when Evadne becomes, not a singer, but a speaker at socialist gatherings. In much of her fiction, West's own love of music would "serve her literary metaphors" (Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism*, p. 561). In this text, Evadne as singer is not made central, but she is the first in a list of musicians in West's fiction, from *Harriet Hume* to the sisters in *The Fountain Overflows* trilogy.

[83]In her essay, "Refiguring the Binary, Breaking the Cycle: Rebecca West as Feminist Modernist", Kime Scott discusses West's "philosophical exploration of dualistic binaries", which can also be seen to operate in this story (Kime Scott, p. 170).

drip from the lacquered leaves of the shrubs in the front garden" (IM, p. 274). The lacquered leaves suggest a transition into something not quite real: the relationship itself, and the confrontation in a surreal landscape which becomes more and more like a waste land. The moonlight finally becomes an emblem for battle, "the undisturbed moonlight lay across it [the pond] like a sharp-edged sword" (IM, p. 277). Not only is this landscape the setting of an imagined sex war, but it is also an uncanny anticipation of the literal and metaphysical "no-man's-land" Gilbert and Gubar relate in their reading of the story.

West briefly presents another "type" of woman in this story, drawn not only from suffragist sources but also from Dora Marsden's editorials. Marsden evokes both the oppression of patriarchy but also the collusion of women in their own oppression in much of her writing. In her attack on "Indissoluble Monogamy", Marsden had criticised the "monopoly and satisfaction" of married women who particularly uphold an unjust system. Olive Schreiner's notion of "sex-parasitism" is fundamental here, and West was deeply influenced by Schreiner's writing and Marsden's variations on Schreiner's themes.[84] In much of her work, West is as critical of certain kinds of women as she is of certain men. The "parasitic woman" is a favoured object of attack: "there is the army of rich parasite women who have nothing to do and no outlet for the force in them except to play with sex and make life its gaudy circus".[85] In "The Future of the Middle Classes: Women who are Parasites",[86] West declares that the middle-class woman will have to stop being a parasite and begin to work for her living. This little emancipation would then create emancipation for women on a larger scale. Women, according to West's thinking, can be as dangerous and detrimental to society as men, and certainly as foolish. The appearance then, of Mrs Mary Ellerker, "an

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[84]Schreiner's description of the "parasitic woman" in *Women and Labour* (1911) is a central preoccupation in West's early writing.

[85]*The Clarion* 26 September 1913, *YRB*, p. 206.

[86]*The Clarion* 1 November 1912, *YRB*, pp. 111-115.

extraordinarily stupid old woman" (IM, p. 269) in an overtly feminist story is less contradictory than it first seems. Mrs Ellerker, a former client of George's, was the occasion for his first meeting Evadne. It is possible to read the inclusion of Mrs Ellerker in the story, and in particular, the following passage, as an early fictionalised version of West's constant criticism of certain types of women with certain kinds of "womanly" features. At the same time, Mrs Ellerker is viewed through the jaded and neurotic eyes of George Silverton. For George she is obscene because:

> She merely presented the loathsome spectacle of an ignorant mind, contorted by the artificial idiocy of coquetry, lack of responsibility and hatred of discipline, stripped naked by old age. That was the real horror of her. One feared to think how many women were really like Mrs Ellerker under their armour of physical perfection or social grace. (IM, p. 269)

West's own voice and criticism is present here, but the description is also another revelation of George's horror of women and his desire to escape and be cleansed of their presence. What is interesting about Mrs Ellerker is that she has outlived four husbands and now has the power to administer their estates. Like Evadne, Mrs Ellerker is a survivor, and a successful one. At the same time, her success is viewed equivocally by West. Like Maud in *Adela*, Mrs Ellerker, in a more decayed form, shows signs of being a parasite. But George's disgust, which is prompted by fear, is the main focus of satire, rather than Mrs Ellerker. It is a fear aroused by successful women. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest, it arises from "the connection between male sexual anxiety and women's entrance into the public sphere".[87] Evadne exemplifies this new type of woman, successful and self-sufficient, with whom the culturally unacclimatised male cannot cope.

A careful investigation of the "war" between George and Evadne again reveals West drawing on a variety of her own ideas as well as on influences around her. Many of the

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[87]Gilbert and Gubar, p. 98.

essays Rebecca West was writing for *The Clarion* at the time were attacks on the treatment of the suffragettes. For example, in "An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex-Antagonism",[88] West attacked the government in a witty and yet scathing manner for their brutality at suffragette demonstrations. She mentioned the false promises of the government and the cruel imprisonment and forced feeding of suffragettes. Naturally, what arises from this brutal treatment is a real bitterness between the sexes:

> It is typical in the bitter thought which it must arouse in every woman of the disturbance in the relationship between men and women which this repression of the suffragette movement has brought about. It is a fact, minimised by the good nature of everyone concerned, that the present structure of society automatically compels women to be oppressed by men ... And the worst of sex-antagonism is that there is such a lot of admissible evidence.[89]

George Silverton represents everything despicable in the contemporary male, imposing his own prejudices and inadequacies on the opposite sex. He accuses Evadne of impurity, adultery and of being racially tainted. In addition to the series of clichés George abides by in his assessment of a "good" woman, Evadne's sensuousness is rendered more deeply suspect by her mixed blood. George describes Evadne's mother as "that weird half-black woman", thus adding to a catalogue of prejudices exposed by West's ridicule and satire.[90] He even launches into a vicious physical attack on his "merely good wife, the faithful attendant of his hearth, relentless wrecker of his soul" (IM, p. 279). Here, West parodies the conventional expectations of a wife, and since the narrative perspective is George's at this point, West parodies his own melodramatic and over-inflated sense of himself. In a later essay, "The Sex War: Disjointed Thoughts on Men", West writes:

> We have asked men for votes, they have given us advice. At present they are

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[88]YRB, p. 97.

[89]*YRB*, pp. 100-101.

[90]West often links class oppression, gender inequalities and racial prejudice. A number of her journalistic articles at this time also deal with racial prejudice. See, for example: "American Women: Their Work as Reformers", *Daily News* 9 March 1916, *YRB*, pp. 314-317 and "Lynch Law: The Tragedy of Ignorance", *The Clarion* 17 October, 1913, *YRB*, pp. 206-211.

> also giving us abuse. I am tired of this running comment on the war-like conduct of my sex, delivered with such insolent assurance and such self-satisfaction. So I am going to do it too.
> Men are poor stuff.[91]

This poor substance is again depicted in George whose insane chase after his supposedly adulterous wife is both comic and absurd. George is made more pathetic with each step he takes: "As he shuffled in pursuit his carpet-slippers were engulfed in a shining pool of mud. He raised one with a squelch, the other was left" (IM, p. 275). The symbolism is comically effective here. If Rebecca West, the suffragette, cannot beat her male opponents politically for the time being, she can slay them with words.

George also moves into a landscape that is surreal and more and more resonant of the kind of waste land T.S. Eliot would write about in 1922. George is not only an unhappy J. Alfred Prufrock, "for George's sexual anxiety, almost a form of male hysteria, is exactly the symptom of masculine cultural enervation that Eliot too would analyze",[92] but also a prototype for Eliot's "Gerontion". "The dry dust of his character was blown hither and thither by fear" (IM, p. 282) in a landscape quivering with rage, where "the squat hawthorn tree creaked slowly like the irritation of a dull little man" (IM, p. 280). In this passage, George and the desiccated landscape become interchangeable. The figure of the anti-hero, so prominent in much modernist writing, is already savagely evident in this story. Whilst West's satiric attack on the patriarchal order is in parts overwritten and verges on the grotesque, she can also be uncannily prophetic. Not only does she anticipate Eliot's portrayal of cultural enervation, but she also anticipates, in her battle of the sexes, the emasculating consequences of the war for men and the entry into public life and subsequent attainment of power by the opposite sex. This historical background has been valuably

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[91] *The Clarion* 18 April 1913, *YRB*, p. 174.
[92] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 97.

explored in Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land*, and their analysis can be fruitfully extended to West's novel of 1918, *The Return of the Soldier*.

What remains to be considered is the way in which the images of Evadne shift, the way in which the landscape is described in terms of a war-zone, and the ironic resolution of the story. The sensuous woman conveyed through the image of the fruit, and also through the domestic image of a cat,[93] shifts to images of woman as Amazon, "The light soaked her bathing-dress so that she seemed, against the jagged shades of the rock cutting, as though she were clad in a garment of dark polished mail" (IM, p. 281), and woman as wild animal. George perceives her constantly in these terms - - her "porpoise-like surface", "her wet seal-smooth head", a creature who to the end persists "in turmoil, in movement, in action..." (IM, p. 283). The reader is left once again with strikingly varied visions of Evadne, her "fat flesh rising on each side of her deep-furrowed spine through the rent in her bathing-dress" (IM, p. 283), and a woman in dark polished mail. Evadne, the warrior woman, again recalls the iconography used by the early feminists, most particularly, the image of Joan of Arc. Especially symbolic for the WSPU, this feminist icon "defied order, division and convention in all aspects of her marginality and strange, militant sanctity. In her virginity, transvestism and military vigilance she subverted the order of femininity, but she was something other than a masquerade. She was and was not a woman".[94] Evadne and her landscape are drawn as spare, sharp shapes ("jagged shades", "hard silver surfaces"), suited to and uncannily representing the Vorticist ideal of "a hard, unromantic external presentation of kinetic forces, an arrangement of surfaces".[95] This cult of hardness is also a Nietzschean one[96] and

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[93]"Perpetually she raised her hand to the mass of black hair that was coiled on her thick golden neck and stroked it with secretive enjoyment, as a cat licks its fur" (IM, p. 267).

[94]Tickner, p. 211.

[95]Qtd in *YRB*, p. 265.

[96]See Patrick Bridgewater's, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1972) for a useful discussion on Vorticism and Nietzsche.

momentarily, Evadne can be seen as a feminist rewriting of the Nietzschean superman.[97] West keeps these multiple representations and transmutations in play throughout the narrative in order to undermine the bigoted male attitudes she portrays in her journalism, as well as to suggest the complexity and strength of women, not just as suffragettes, but in all facets of life. Evadne triumphs, however, through a passive resistance rather than militancy, and this has created some problems for feminist critics of the story. For Gilbert and Gubar, Rebecca West "reveals her realistic understanding - shared with other female-adhered heroines - that women are not culturally conditioned to engage in acts of physical aggression".[98] What needs to be added here is the way in which West highlights the irony of the situation:

> There entered into her the primitive woman who is the curse of all women: a creature of the most utter femaleness, useless, save for childbirth, with no strong brain to make her physical weakness a light accident, abjectly and corruptingly afraid of man. A squaw, she dared not strike her lord. (IM, p. 281)

The passage is curious and discomforting. West is striking out at a stereotype, but at the same time, this "primitive woman" is somehow related to the "parasitic woman" and to a type she portrays in a series of essays of 1916, entitled "The World's Worst Failure".[99] Drawing on essentialist feminist theories, West suggests here that this kind of submissiveness might be instinctive rather than the result of social conditioning. West's reference to "primitive woman" and implicitly to an evolutionary discourse rooted once again in Olive Schreiner's writing, is tentative and brief here. The description of Evadne's action is more a question than a statement. Surfacing but not yet explored in depth, this attitude to the nature of "woman" and "womanliness" was to preoccupy West during and after the Great War. Whilst Evadne's evasion is described in critical terms, her passive resistance may,

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[97]Kime Scott also refers to a Nietzschean connection in *Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 1, p. 107.
[98]Gilbert and Gubar, p. 100.
[99]This series will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

however, signal West's rejection of the militant movement in favour of subtler forms of resistance.

The nightmare landscape created for confrontation between George and Evadne is melodramatic. The language becomes suffused with military images, and the natural surroundings take on the appearance of a battle-ground. "The rugged crags opposite him were a low barricade against the stars to which the mound where he stood shot forward like a bridge" (IM, p. 276). The image of light, which had at first signified plenitude, is here sharpened and dangerous. It is a sharp edged sword and blazes so strongly "that each reed could be clearly seen like a black dagger stabbing the silver" (IM, p. 277). Once again, the hardness and sharpness of the scene is reminiscent of the Vorticist manifesto. The light imagery suggests dual possibilities: it represents both female sexuality and power, and Evadne embodies both of these.

Curiously, the actual battle is described in terms of a vortex: "Then the rock cleft and he was swallowed by a brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung him again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder. All about him fought the waters, and they cut his flesh like knives" (IM, p. 282). In the light of the story's publication in *Blast* and the lateness of the conception of Vorticism, this description may have been coincidental, although more likely it illustrates West's alertness to new concepts and new ideas circulating at the time. Pound claimed to have come up with the word "vortex"[100] and in 1913 he likened London to a vortex.[101] Wyndham Lewis later described the vortex and Vorticism as a whirlpool, and "at the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated, and there at the point of concentration is the Vorticist".[102] George Silverton is

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[100]Dasenbrock, p. 14.
[101]Kenner, p. 238.
[102]Qtd. in Dasenbrock, p. 17.

caught in the whirling waters around the vortex. It is possible to suggest that Evadne's position is at the still point of the whirling waters before she slips away from her husband. Evadne is the still centre of the story, triumphing through her concentrated passivity ("she dropped like a stone", IM, p. 283), which conceals her vitality and her will to resist. George is only a cuckold and a murderer in his imagination, and he returns home to find not only that Evadne has survived, but that she has unconsciously ensured her survival through her thrifty habit of turning off the gas. In Gilbert and Gubar's opinion, West is here fantasizing about "an undrownable heroine and also about a hero not worth drowning".[103] The story is certainly a form of black comedy, where West is able to satirize the institution of marriage within a patriarchal society. George, a caricature of contemporary social and particularly male prejudices, has his expectations thwarted, while being entangled in the imprisoning conventions of his own construction.

West's fiction centres primarily on the heterosexual couple, and how they exist horribly, and sometimes happily, together. George cannot simply rid himself of an unwanted woman and wife in the same way that Mr Lloyd George and his followers cannot simply rid themselves of suffragette demands.[104] George envisages the appeals of a world devoid of women, even if it is death that must bring this about, only to discover that "Evadne lay on his deathbed" (IM, p. 288). George's absurdly heroic self-image is shattered once more and his vision collapses into bathos. If this story is a fictionalised version of West's journalism, it is a humorous threat and an assertion of power. The final image in the story is of the impotent husband resigning himself to the failure of his murder and suicide plans, and contemplating his sleeping wife who is illuminated by "the ray of the street lamp" (IM, p. 288). Evadne's warm arms are regenerative but also imprisoning. It is a highly significant

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[103]Gilbert and Gubar, p. 100.
[104]See "An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty", *YRB*, pp. 97-101.

and suggestive final image, as Kern points out:

> West and Proust dramatize the realignment of power between the sexes in emphasizing how even the sleeping woman is not vulnerable but potent and self-sufficient: she presents to the sleepwatching male not an opportunity for sexual indulgence but an occasion for reflection on the impossibility of possessing anyone.[105]

Evadne's autonomy is what enrages and terrifies her husband, emblematising perhaps the fear of those opposing the demand for the vote for women. This powerful self-containment, emanating from the body, also recalls that of the Spanish dancer, Nana, and even her namesake, Zola's Nana. What horrifies the Count Muffat in *Nana*, and it is a horror provoked by fear, is Nana's self-sufficiency, her lack of a need for a male audience: "Nana s'était absorbée dans son ravissement d'elle-même".[106] In her comic version of Marsden's "Indissoluble Monogamy" and her reappraisal of Zola's heroine, West inverts social norms and traditional hierarchies, to provide a highly ironical rendition of the conventional idea of matrimony and she provides a spectrum of possible definitions of "woman" who, in the end, can neither be contained nor categorised. Ironically too, the last transformation of Evadne swerves away from the hard, aggressive shapes and forces valued by the Vorticists. The final image is one of plump flesh and warm blood, recalling the glowing fruits at the beginning of the story and evoking power through obvious female and fecund associations.

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[105]Kern, p. 236. George's disempowerment as he watches his sleeping wife makes an interesting contrast with the way in which Adela is inspired and strengthened by gazing at the sleeping body of Psyche in "The Sentinel".

[106]Zola, *Nana*, p. 216.

Chapter Four

Women, War and Writing: Fiction and Journalism on the Home Front

> "the battle for women's suffrage, the battle for modern art, and the battle in the trenches [cannot] be separated".[1]
>
> "No, I dont see whats [to] be done about war. Its manliness; and manliness breeds womanliness - both so hateful [sic]".[2]

West's presentation of the embattled couple who "perceived that God is war and his creatures are meant to fight" (IM, p. 280) in *Blast*, anticipates the complex weave of war, women and art to emerge in a great deal of writing during the years of the First World War. The interrelatedness of these warring positions remains at the forefront of much of West's non-fiction writing between 1914 and 1918. West's article, "Reading Henry James in War Time", vividly illustrates a continuum in her thoughts about sex-antagonism first explored in "Indissoluble Matrimony", now intensified by the war, and about the relation of literature to present circumstances. In this article, West wittily complains of the disadvantages of "belonging to the sheltered sex", "while the protecting sex, safely out of reach, pours down death from the clouds".[3] Just as George in "Indissoluble Matrimony", as the conventional husband he would like to be, ought not to be thinking of murdering his wife, the Germans, although enemies, still belong to the sex that has promised protection to "the weaker sex", the non-combatant female. West builds on this irony by drawing into the discussion her own commentary on Henry James's last volume of "Notes on Novelists". Here, with the threatening drone of Zeppelins overhead, West launches an attack on James, not only for dismissing D.H. Lawrence as a novelist, but for a lack of passion in his own work. But just as she warms to her theme, West perceives another irony, one which undercuts her initial

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[1] James Longenbach, "The Women and Men of 1914", p. 98.

[2] *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. Six 1936-1941, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, (New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 464.

[3] *The New Republic* February 27, 1915, p. 98.

criticism of James, returns her to the earlier theme of the unprotected sex and which leads to a broader observation on war. Passion, and particularly patriotic passion is as deadly as the war itself.

> I had once felt it as an alienating quality of Mr James's genius that his work showed an inhuman incapacity for enthusiasm, that he disliked and refused causes coolly as other people dislike and refuse seed-cake. But as the throb of the Zeppelin returned and I knew again the helpless rage of the non-combatant, the sick fear of instant death, I realized that enthusiasm was not so necessarily divine as I had thought. For those murderers by intent who were circling above my head in an attempt to locate the lightless town for purposes of butchery were probably burning with as pure and exalted a passions they could conceive. This war has shown that every warm passion - loyalty, patriotism, ambition - can be perverted to obscene uses.[4]

West's analysis here of the position of women in wartime, in relation to her perception of Jamesian aesthetics, highlights a series of complex links and indeed divisions between her writing about women, war and her developing theories about literature at this juncture. Although West used the technique of intertwining feminist, war and aesthetic commentary regularly in the articles she wrote during the war years, an important split emerges between her insistent concentration, not only on women's war work, but on issues of the domestic and maternal, and the influence of mainly male literary mentors. Her Vorticist links, brief as they were, and her exposure to a series of new writers and new ideas about literature through Ford Madox Ford's literary circle, to some extent replaced West's earliest influences - the New Women and suffrage novel writers.[5] During this period, some of West's most important literary mentors were men, and it was within this male-dominated literary world that she set out to assert and establish her position as a critic and fiction writer. As Margaret Stetz notes: "As a woman who had received no formal education after the age of sixteen and who, far from beginning her adult life as a student of literary theory, had

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[4] *The New Republic* February 27, 1915, p. 100.

[5] Although the profound influence of Olive Schreiner's writing continues not only in West's feminist discourses, but in her fiction too.

started it as a bit player on the British stage, West was no doubt eager to establish her own credentials as an aesthetic critic and sage".[6] The publication of her first work of literary criticism, *Henry James* (1916), and her novel *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), were in some sense, a challenge to the literary establishment for recognition. West's first published novel can also be seen as a point where the literary and feminist interests she expressed, juxtaposed and practised in her journalism, met and came together. I will consider the relation between male mentors, women and war as a context for discussing *The Return of the Soldier* in Chapter 5.

Male Mentors

The unusual literary trio, Henry James, Ford Madox Ford and H.G. Wells, representing the emerging schism between "realist" and "modernist" fiction, formed the nub of West's male literary mentorship, against and alongside which she endeavoured to define her own critical and aesthetic practises. From 1914, she set out to describe a new and, for her, necessary aesthetic of criticism in conjunction with her theories on the art of fiction. Her Vorticist and suffragette affiliations are evident in her declaration that "A little grave reflection shows us that our first duty is to establish a new and abusive school of criticism".[7] She reiterates her call for this kind of criticism in her book on Henry James, declaring that "he lacked ... that necessary attribute of the good critic, the power to bid bad authors to go to the devil" (HJ, p. 66). In fact, West had been a founding "member" of this school of criticism from her earliest literary reviews, and her desire to formalize or identify her critical approach as a school or movement was a way of positioning herself both within and outside the literary establishment. Her book reviews and commentary on contemporary writing

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[6]Stetz, "Rebecca West and the Visual Arts", p. 49.
[7]"The Duty of Harsh Criticism", *The New Republic*, November 7, 1914, p. 19.

remained as implacable and uncompromising as ever, despite complex and difficult personal circumstances at this time, which left her isolated from literary contacts.[8] In spite of this isolation and her sense of being entrapped in a traditional female space of the domestic and the maternal, West found the opportunity to turn private experiences into public ones through her journalism. Having left *The New Freewoman* and *The Clarion* in 1913 other journalistic opportunities arose through professional and personal connections.[9] Carl Rollyson has suggested that H.G. Wells found West work with the American paper *The New Republic*:

> H.G. worried that Rebecca would soon tire of domesticity, especially since his visits were brief and sporadic. He lined up writing jobs for her. He got Walter Lippmann, founder of a new periodical, *The New Republic*, and a devout admirer of H.G. as the prophet of a new age, to make Rebecca a contributing editor. Soon she was writing on literary and social topics.[10]

This paper provided a platform for a number of very varied articles by West. Launched in November 1914, West was one of its first contributors with "The Duty of Harsh Criticism". Her evocation so early on in the war of its horrors, "Now, when every day the souls of men go up from France like smoke, we feel that humanity is the flimsiest thing, easily divided into nothingness and rotting flesh"[11], prefigured the journal's obsessive interest in the war, mainly from an American perspective, of course.[12]

West's articles on war, women and literature appeared regularly in the *New Republic* and also in the *Daily News and Leader.* She started writing for the latter in 1913, having

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[8]West gave birth to a son in August 1914. The difficulties she faced as an unmarried mother will be further discussed in the next section.

[9]According to J.R. Hammond in *H.G. Wells and Rebecca West*, "By the end of 1913 Rebecca had decided to sever her connection with *The Clarion*. For some time she had been aware that her interests were changing and that writing polemical journalism no longer satisfied her as it had in former years. Her inclinations were becoming more and more literary and she longed to express herself in reviewing and in the writing of fiction" (Hammond, p. 78).

[10]Rollyson, p. 39.

[11]"The Duty of Harsh Criticism", p. 20.

[12]*The New Republic* was not exclusively political, and it published poetry by Robert Frost and new writing by William Faulkner, H.G. Wells and Rebecca West. In the twenties, Virginia Woolf contributed a number of literary essays and reviews, and two chapters of Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* appeared there in 1921. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, Vol. V: Sketches of 21 Magazines 1905-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 211.

been introduced to the paper through her Fabian friend, S.K. Ratcliffe who was also a journalist at the *Daily News*.[13] As the foremost liberal newspaper of its day, "the best selling liberal newspaper and, by contemporary standards, the most fearless",[14] it provided an animated portrait of the multiple conflicts of the day. The paper championed a number of causes including women's suffrage, and it is noticeable that the issue of women and war work came to the fore in many other war-related debates.[15] West contributed to other important papers, including the *Daily Herald*, *Everyman*, the *Manchester Daily Dispatch* and the *Daily Chronicle*. She also wrote for the American *Atlantic Monthly*. Thus, despite her isolation, West managed to expand her reading public and diversify the places in which she could air political opinions and develop her aesthetic theories.

In these papers, especially *The New Republic* and the *Daily News*, West discussed a very broad range of writers on a variety of literary and political topics. Her enthusiastic reception of translations of Dostoevsky's novels,[16] was balanced by a vitriolic attack on Theodore Dreiser's *The Genius*,[17] and a less than enthusiastic response to Tolstoy .[18] She also

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[13]Her biographers offer slightly different versions of this; according to Carl Rollyson, Ratcliffe was the connection, while Victoria Glendinning suggests that the link was through Robert Lynd, the literary editor.

[14]Stephen Koss, *Fleet Street Radical: A.G. Gardiner and the "Daily News"* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 7.

[15]What is especially interesting is the way in which attitudes towards the war shifted, led by changes in the view of the editor, A. G. Gardiner himself. Ford Madox Ford provided an especially illuminating insight: "More than any memorandum or volume of memoirs, his leaders and columns in the *Daily News* provide us with evidence of the change which came over public opinion and the painful process by which the vast majority of liberals came tardily to the conclusion that war was justifiable" (Stephen Koss, p. 140). The variety of contributors to the paper's literary sections also added colour and diversity. Gardiner was friendly with Bennett, Wells and Shaw, although Bennett contributed the most during the war years: his most recent novel was serialised, and he submitted several patriotic articles on the war. E.M. Forster was among the many who shared the book review column with West, and Joseph Conrad contributed a series of articles in 1915 on Poland and the war. As a paper whose first editor was Charles Dickens, albeit briefly (Koss, p. 33), its literary interests were maintained, although it is noticeable that the literary section was diminished on some days by the depressingly long lists of those missing and/or killed in action. What is important here is that the variety of issues raised in the paper gave West ample space for airing the often controversial views raised in her book reviews.

[16]See "The Barbarians" (January 9, 1915), "Redemption and Dostoevsky" (June 5, 1915) and "Redemption and Dostoevsky" (sic) (July 10, 1915) in *The New Republic* and "Dostoevsky Again", *Daily News*, 15 April, 1916). Although critics have noted the importance of Dostoevsky for writers such as West (see Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism Vol. 1,* p. 179), little detailed attention has been paid to West's responses to his writing, either in her reviews or in her own fiction.

[17]"The Artist", *Daily News* 23 December 1915, p. 6.

criticised G.B. Shaw for his attitude towards the war[19] as vigorously as she attacked Ellen Key's brand of feminism.[20] Most striking, however, is West's persistent return to the fiction of Henry James in her journalism. Significantly, too, her responses to the writing of Ford Madox Ford and H.G. Wells were intrinsically linked to her assessment of James.

West's preoccupation with Henry James reflected a desire to name him as a precursor and, by building on the reputation she had already created for herself, to establish a literary identity in relation to him. As Margaret Stetz notes: "the Modernist era itself - the period in which Rebecca West came of age as an artist - appears to have been a time when writers of both sexes felt a greater than usual pressure to name and to align themselves with precursors".[21] By doing this, West involved herself in a general debate over the art of fiction, formalized and publicised to some extent by the famous disagreement between H.G. Wells and Henry James, and carried further by Virginia Woolf's separation of the "Edwardians" from the "Georgians".[22]

Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray have suggested that it was James's article, "The Younger Generation", published in the *Times Literary Supplement* (19 March and 2 April 1914), that precipitated the disagreements over aesthetics between Wells and James into a bitter conflict.[23] In his article, James "foreshadows Woolf's attack on the Edwardians - even to the extent of dividing the authors covered into older and younger generations", and rebuking certain writers for their "massive accumulation of detail with no attempt to structure

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[18]"The Soul of a Prophet", *Daily News* 26 September, 1917, p. 2.

[19]"Mr Shaw's Diverted Genius", *The New Republic* 3 December 1914, pp. 13-14.

[20]"Eroto-Priggery", *The New Republic* 13 March, 1915, pp. 150-152.

[21]Stetz, "Rebecca West and the Visual Arts", p. 45. Stetz's thesis that West found affiliations in the end with male composers and painters rather than writers is persuasive and useful.

[22]See Virginia Woolf's "Modern Novels" and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown". See also Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson, eds., *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

[23]See L. Edel and Gordon N. Ray, eds., *Henry James and H.G. Wells: A Record of Their Friendship, Their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and Their Quarrel* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958).

it into an artistic whole".[24] Wells, in *An Englishman Looks at the World*, had already reiterated his views on the social function of the novel, declaring that it should "be the social mediator, the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of laws and institutions and of social dogmas and ideas. It is to be the home confessional, the initiator of knowledge, the seed of fruitful self-questioning".[25] Wells's vision and criteria for the novel, more and more at odds with James's aesthetic views on style and technique, culminated in his infamous and scathing attack on James in *Boon* (1915), particularly in response to James's 1914 *TLS* article. The publication of *Boon* marked the end of their long, literary friendship. In *Boon*, Wells complains that James's characters are denatured, that his theory of selection is no more than omission and that "he omits opinions".[26] Rebecca West, whose literary relationship with Wells was both appreciative and critical,[27] shared Wells's criticism of James's lack of interest in political and social issues. In the many articles which touch on James at this time, she repeats her own criticism of his aloofness and his Flaubertian preoccupation with style. West included other writers who had, in her opinion, similar flaws to James: "we have Mr Ford Madox Hueffer ... who practised to perfection that humped indifference to all human organisations which Mr Henry James and Mr Joseph Conrad advocate as the proper attitude for the artist".[28] In the same month, West wrote a stinging attack on Wells's critics for suggesting that "[i]deas have no place in a novel. This dogma that ideas have no place in a novel is poisonous nonsense that ought not to be spread in a society where the mind is unnaturally receptive because it is fatigued by the contemplation

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[24]Keating, pp. 290-291.
[25]H.G. Wells, *An Englishman Looks at the World* (London: Cassell & Co., 1914), pp. 167-168.
[26]H.G. Wells, *Boon* (London: T. Fisher Unwin,1915), pp. 104-105.
[27]Like Arnold Bennett, West saw Wells as a literary "uncle" whose influence was to be both acknowledged and repudiated. See her essay "Uncle Bennett" in *The Strange Necessity* (1928).
[28]*Daily News* "The Novelist in Controversy: A Reply to Mr Bernard Shaw", November 11, 1915, p. 4.

of horror".[29] West's interest in matters political, especially feminist politics, made her unwilling entirely to relinquish practices of the social or realist novel to James's purist doctrine, although didactism and propaganda were as much anathema to her as "art for art's sake".

At the same time, West's sympathy with aspects of Wells's "school" of fiction did not preclude her from aligning herself with his antagonists. Her literary leanings were in fact more towards the narrative techniques James and, in his wake, Ford Madox Ford, extolled. West's constant recourse to a discussion of Jamesian aesthetics in her journalism was a way of formulating her ideas about his writing and about the adaptations she might make of it. West also wrote admiringly of Ford Madox Ford at this time, praising especially *The Good Soldier*: "Its first claim on the attention is the obvious loveliness of the colour and cadence of its language, and it is also clever as the novels of Mr Henry James are clever, with all sorts of acute discoveries about human nature; and at times it is radiantly witty".[30] It was Madox Ford's adaptation of the limited Jamesian narrator that West appreciated in particular.

> Mr Hueffer has used the device, invented and used successfully by Mr Henry James and used not nearly so credibly by Mr Conrad, of presenting the story not as it appeared to some divine and omnipresent intelligence, but as it was observed by some intervener not too intimately concerned in the plot...And out of the leisured colloquialism of the gentle American who tells the story Mr Hueffer has made a prose that falls on the page like sunlight. It was the supreme triumph of art, that effect of effortlessness and inevitableness, which Mengs described when he said that one of Velasquez's pictures seemed to be painted not by the hand but by pure thought".[31]

West returns to this ideal of authorial detachment, illustrating her point by referring to

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[29]"The Novel of Ideas", *The New Republic* November 20, 1915, p. 4.

[30]"Mr Hueffer's New Novel", *Daily News* April 2, 1915, *YRB*, p. 298.

[31]*YRB*, p. 300. "But he [Velasquez] has given the most perfect copy of nature in the picture of a woman spinning, which is of his last style and manner, and so well executed, that the labour of the hand seems not to have been employed, but that the mind alone conveyed the pencil, in which its merit is singular", *Sketches on the Art of Painting: With a Description of the most Capital Pictures in the King of Spain's Palace at Madrid. In a Letter from Sir Anthony Raphael Mengs, KNT First Painter to his Catholic Majesty*. Translated from the Original Spanish, by John Talbot Dillon, Knight and Baron of the Sacred Roman Empire, (London: Baldwin, Pater-Noster-Row, 1732, p. 63).

Velasquez again, in *Henry James*. Here she explores an aesthetic ideal to which she herself aspired during this period: "for the state of genius consists of an utter surrender of the mind to the subject. The artist at the moment of creation must be like a saint awaiting the embrace of God, scourging appetite out of him, shrinking from sensation as though it were a sin, deleting self, lifting his consciousness like an empty cup to receive the heavenly draught" (*HJ*, p. 87). Eschewing the intrusive, heavy-handed narration of the Wellsian school, West embraces the stylistic ideal of authorial detachment and refinement. It was an ideal she tried to practice in writing *The Return of the Soldier*, building up her narrative through the gaze of a marginalized yet involved observer. Achieving such an ideal was, for a writer whose journalistic identity depended on a very personal and assertive voice, an exercise in restraint.

The aesthetic ideal of detachment, concision and self-effacement practised in her narrative fiction at this time provides an important contrast with West's "abusive school of criticism". Her publication of *Henry James* in 1916 is significant not only because it provides an important theoretical context against which *The Return of the Soldier* can be read, but also because it was a bold, public statement that Rebecca West, well-known feminist and journalist, was also a woman-of-letters. It was not coincidental that Ford Madox Ford should have published an adulatory book on James in 1913,[32] followed by Wells's attack in *Boon* in 1915 and finally West's *Henry James* in 1916. West's book embarked on a dialogue with the extreme views of Wells and Ford Madox Ford, deliberately intervening in discussions about art, hitherto exclusive to the literary establishment. In opposition to Wells, she admired James's polish and his attention to language: "It was of inestimable value that it should be cried, no matter in how pert a voice, that words are jewels which, wisely set, make by their shining mental light" (*HJ*, pp. 81-82). She countered Ford Madox Ford's

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[32]Ford Madox Ford, *Henry James: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1913).

refusal to criticise the master through her own irreverence. For example, commenting on *The Golden Bowl*, West notes: "With sentences vast as the granite blocks of the Pyramids and a scene that would have made a site for a capital he set about constructing a story the size of a hen-house" (*HJ*, p. 107). More interested in James's portrayal of his heroines than either Wells or Ford, West alludes at several points to limitations within his novels:

> but there is also another element that irritates present-day readers and makes the texture of the life represented seem poor. That element, which is not peculiar to Mr James, but is a part of the social atmosphere of his time, is the persistent presentation of woman not as a human but as a sexual being. One can learn nothing of the heroine's beliefs and character for the hullabaloo that has been set up because she has come in too late or gone out too early... (*HJ*, p. 53).

West's witty, irreverent and appreciative criticism offered a deliberate challenge, demanding that she be taken seriously as a critic and literary figure in her own right. It proved to be provocative. As Glendinning notes: "the literary establishment found it offensive that a 23-year-old should feel free to criticize the master, particularly as he had been dead only a few months".[33] The extent to which critics were antagonised is revealed in a letter from Wells to Hugh Walpole: "Anyhow nothing I've ever written or said or anything anyone has every written or said about James can balance the extravagant dirtiness of Lubbock and his friends in boycotting Rebecca West's book on him in *The Times Literary Supplement*".[34] West's apprenticeship in the footsteps of the master was acceptable; her assumption of the role of critic was not. Her respectful criticism of James in her journalism and in her book were a hallmark of her attitude towards her male mentors at this time. Just as she wished to emulate and learn from their writing, she also wished to assert her difference and individuality.

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[33]Glendinning, p. 59.

[34]Qtd. in Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, *The Life of H.G. Wells: The Time Traveller* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 292.

Female Spaces and War

West established this difference partially through her feminist persepective on domestic spaces and on the roles of women during wartime. The war became a cutting edge and a point of definition in her writing, both in her consideration of the role of art and of the gendered structures of society. Her exploration of "the extreme dubiety of the advantages of belonging to the sheltered sex", and "the helpless rage of the non-combatant" in "Reading Henry James in War Time", is especially intense in the light of the changes she experienced, not only because of the war, but because of her complex personal circumstances. The declaration of war in August 1914 coincided with the birth of her son Anthony, fathered by H.G. Wells. It was an event which isolated her from her newly acquired status in literary and journalistic circles. As a mistress and as a single mother, she found herself in a very difficult position. Sue Brandon's comment on West and Amber Reeves (one of Wells's previous mistresses who had also fallen pregnant), is useful: "It was also that they both found themselves confronted by a situation with which, despite all the brave words, they could not really cope. In the end, society and the threat of its disapprobation was too much for them".[35] Not only did West go into a kind of hiding; she and Wells chose to keep their identities as parents a secret. West was now not only denied access to the literary world she had just gained, but she also had to conceal her identity as a mother. The stress and frustration of her confinement and her new role as mother are evident in the scanty journals she kept at the time and in her correspondence. At the same time, the experience of motherhood provided rich material both for her journalism and fiction.

As a non-combatant and as a mother who neither joined women's war work at home nor the Nursing Corps abroad, West's experience of war may seem to have been limited, but

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[35]*The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1990), p. 260.

she did have some close contact with what was happening, or at least with what some people said was happening. Her friendship with May Sinclair[36] who visited Belgium in 1915 provided some insights. West also reviewed Sinclair's book on her war experiences, *Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915). H.G. Wells's own intense interest in the war and his visit to the front in 1916 provided another important link. As close friend and mistress, West was no doubt privy to many of Wells's thoughts about the war, and his influence can be detected in many of her articles dealing with these and other issues. Although his views of war can be seen to have influenced West's, her adaptations of his ideas often emerge as forms of critique rather than mere emulation.

His reaction to the outbreak of the Great War was that of many others at the time; he greeted it with patriotic fervour and certainty that it would be over by Christmas. In his famous essay, "The War that Will End War", he defended the participation of Britain because: "We have been pledged to protect the integrity of Belgium since the kingdom of Belgium has existed".[37] It was a question of honour, an attack on German imperialism and a moral cause. At the same time, Wells warned against any rabid reaction and wrote prophetically of the consequences of a harsh peace treaty:

> We are fighting Germany, but we are fighting without any hatred of the German people. We do not intend to destroy either their freedom or their unity. But we have to destroy an evil system of government and the mental and material corruption that has got hold of the German imagination and taken possession of German life. We have to smash the Prussian Imperialism as thoroughly as Germany in 1871 smashed the rotten imperialism of Napoleon III. And we have to learn from the failure of that victory to avoid a vindictive triumph.[38]

Wells published a great number of articles on war at the time and he published several war

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[36]Diary entries record dinner and lunch dates with various people, including May Sinclair; See diary entry 12 July 1917: "Dinner May Sinclair" (Tulsa Archive).

[37]W. Warren Wager, ed., *H.G. Wells: Journalism and Prophecy 1893-1946* (London: Bodley Head, 1964), p. 55.

[38]H.G. Wells, "The War that will end War", ed. W. Warren Wager, p. 56.

novels, including the famous *Mr Britling Sees it Through* (1916) and later *Joan and Peter* (1918). He was active in contributing ideas towards new military strategies and later in the war, he became involved in writing anti-German propaganda.[39] At the same time, Wells was involved early on with the formation of the "League of Nations", and all his war writing gestured towards world peace and reconciliation. Thus he embraced the war effort as a means to a greater end, an end which became more urgent as the war dragged on. Wells's initial enthusiasm soon dwindled, and the pain and disillusionment felt by many is registered most vividly in *Mr Britling Sees it Through*.

West's responses are obviously indebted in some ways to Wells's moral reading of the war, but there are some striking deviations from his position too, and in general, a sense of a conversation, sometimes discursive, sometimes argumentative, running through the work of both authors. West's personal experiences during the war inevitably affected her writing differently from Wells. The food shortages were especially difficult for a new mother, and she soon found herself too close for comfort to air raids. Despite this, she was sympathetic to Wells's defence of the war, and in a highly critical review of a book by Ellen Key, feminist and pacifist, West cites similar justifications for the war as Wells had done in his early war writing.

> If every English-woman had recorded an anti-militarist vote in the summer of 1914 it would not have altered the situation of August in the smallest degree. We should still have been faced with the fact that Belgium had been laid waste, and that all the decency in the world must work for her restoration.[40]

Significantly, West develops Wells's patriotic attitude that "our honour and our pledge obliged us"[41] to the more convincing (if not more propagandistic) assertion that "If we refrain

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[39]"Wells went to work in the Cabinet propaganda office" with Director of Propaganda, Lord Northcliffe. David C. Smith, *H.G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 237.

[40]"Woman Worship", *Daily News* 13 April 1917, *YRB*, p. 340.

[41]Wager, ed., p. 56.

from regarding the invasion of Belgium as a crime, we foment a state of public opinion which would tolerate England's commission of a similar crime if the occasion arose".[42] Thus the war becomes a metaphor for the metaphysical, the evil within which must be overcome. At the same time, there is no appeal to patriotism here, and in a review of Havelock Ellis's *Essays in Wartime*, West endorses the way in which "he destroys every kind of argument by which people pretend that warfare is anything but an offence against humanity".[43]

What is interesting about West's engagement with war issues is her "philosophical ambivalence".[44] She constantly condemns the destructiveness of war outright, and yet she considers some of its consequences in a more positive light, especially in relation to the position of women in a crumbling and yet changing society. While she could see reasons for the fighting, West never supported the fighting itself, and the full horror and waste are evident from an early stage in her writing. In an article written only months after the war had started, when England was still full of fervour and excitement, West writes of the "Disgust at the daily death-bed which is Europe".[45] The terrible consequences of war are described in an article for *The Atlantic Monthly* two years later.[46] Here, West addresses not the horrors of the battle front, but the home front which she knew much better.[47] With her stinging

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[42] *YRB*, p. 340.

[43] "War and Women", *Daily News* 20 December, 1916, *YRB*, p. 333.

[44] See Margaret Stetz's essay "Drinking `The Wine of Truth': Philosophical Change in West's *The Return of the Soldier*", *Arizona Quarterly* V. 43 (1), (Spring 1987), pp. 76-7).

[45] "The Duty of Harsh Criticism", *New Republic* November 7, 1914, p. 20.

[46] Rollyson suggests that the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Ellery Sedgwick, requested work from West (Rollyson, p. 41). Although she did not contribute a great deal to it, this paper and the *New Republic* created important American literary connections for her, which were to flourish in the twenties. *The Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art and Politics*, started in 1857, had a long history of literary editors and contributors including Hawthorne, Longfellow and Emerson. A number of British writers contributed, Robert Browning, Thomas Hardy and Mrs Oliphant. In the early twentieth century, writers such as Robert Frost, John Galsworthy and Edward Garnett were published. Although the magazine had started off with "the definite purpose of concentrating the efforts of the best writers upon literature and politics, under the light of the highest morals" (De Wolfe Howe, p. 26), by the late nineteen hundreds, it turned "to political controversy, social reforms, and the exposure of corruption of government" (Mott, *A History of American Magazines 1885-1905*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 8). Its mixture of past literary interest and current social and political engagement made the magazine an ideal setting for West's uncompromising writing at the time.

[47] In response to a bombing of Scarborough, West writes that "this murder of ordinary people is unendurable" ("The Barbarians", *The New Republic* January 9, 1915, p. 21).

satire, West writes that, "[t]his spectacle of an endless stream of men filing out to die with slow, deliberate steps and casual smiles is so wonderful, so infinitely lacerating, that nothing else seems to matter".[48] At the centre of this article lies the notion of violent change suffered by a nation, and particularly for those who remained behind: "Yet war is as devouring a thing as it always was, and all our English life is changed, and much of it destroyed. It is the heart of our life that is devoured, the quiet, hidden places where the future is nourished: the part of the world that is the care of women".[49] A central theme of *The Return of the Soldier* resonates through the entire article, the painful and irreversible changes that war brings to all of the characters in the novel. The effect of this change on the suburban, the ordinary, the unheroic women who, as a sex, have been designated as carers and child-bearers is an important aspect of West's feminist interests at this time. This concentration on the home front in her journalism provides a useful lens through which to read the novel.

The preoccupation with change, triggered by the war and the consequences for women and for women's movements was not unique to West.[50] Her perception of the position of women is both a continuation of her pre-war articles and a re-consideration: "[B]ecause our outlook upon it [the economic position of women] has been so profoundly changed by the war".[51] The kinds of changes occurring during the war and the consequences of these changes for the women's movements provoked a great deal of debate, not only amongst feminist theorists such as Ellen Key, Mary Sargent Florence and Catherine

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[48]This spectacle is recalled and vividly recaptured in West's posthumous novel *This Real Night* (London: Virago, 1987), where the brother, Richard Quin, parts from his adoring sisters for the war.

[49]"Women of England", *The Atlantic Monthly* January 1916, p. 1.

[50]West's fascination with these transitions emerges again in the novel she ghosted, *War Nurse.* Published anonymously in 1930 after being serialised for *Cosmopolitan*, it begins: "The world is changed, the war changed it. *I've* changed, the war changed me", (*War Nurse: The True Story of a Woman who lived, loved and suffered on the Western Front*, New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1930, p. 3). My thanks to Vanessa Farr for tracking down a copy of this book for me.

[51]"Woman's Work", *Daily News* 7 August, 1916, *YRB*, p. 319.

Marshall[52] at the time, but also amongst some members of the male literati. H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, both self-declared supporters of women's emancipation (although the fiction of both writers is more equivocal in this regard), engaged themselves in the issue of women, war and the future for women. In 1916 Wells published an essay "What the War is Doing for Women"[53] and Bennett published an earlier essay in 1915 entitled "The War and the Future of Women".[54] Like the figure of the "New Woman" at the turn of the century, the subject of woman and war was a prime topic for debate and appropriation.

These social and political changes *around* the women's movements resulted in changes *within* them. A number of recent studies on women's war writing and the feminist movements during this time have revealed a great diversity of response and representation at that period. The male public domain became the "war front", and the private, domestic sphere, the "home front". Whilst the "home front" was associated with women and other non-combatants, some women became nurses in order to get closer to the "war front", and others joined munitions factories or undertook other kinds of war work, either to identify more closely with the war or to make money - or both. Thus, the home front was itself a divided one. These divisions continue on another level too, that of class. As Angela Woollacott asserts: "In theorizing the female war narrative ... it is equally fallacious to assume that there is only one female experience of war as of any other lived reality. Female experience varies by race, by culture, and by class".[55] She goes on to argue that "class differences must be included in any analysis of the construction and operation of gender; perhaps most particularly at moments of social crisis, such as war, factors of difference disrupt the

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[52]See Margaret Kamester and Jo Vellacott, eds., *Militarism versus Feminism: Writings of Women and War, Mary Sargent Florence, Catherine Marshall, C.K. Ogden,* (London: Virago, 1987).

[53]W. Warren Wager, ed., pp. 77-83.

[54]*New Sunday Picture Newspaper*, March 1915.

[55]Angela Woollacott, "Sisters and Brothers in Arms: Family, Class, and Gendering in World War I Britain", Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 130.

commonalities of gender".[56]

This already divided home front was further divided by differing responses to the war itself, from the supporters and the pacifists, and the theories that lay behind their opposing positions. One of the central arguments here, paradoxically used by both sides, was the role of motherhood.[57] Debates raged at the time on the relation of motherhood to pacifism or at least to distinctly different views on the war. Those feminists who supported the idea of separate spheres clashed with those women who believed in equal rights for equal abilities. And yet sometimes these two different approaches became mixed up with each other. Catherine Marshall in 1915 describes the war as "an outrage on motherhood"[58], a view Olive Schreiner took in her seminal feminist work, *Women and Labour* (1911), and yet at the same time, Schreiner suggests that women can take part in war, and historically have done so. Schreiner's contention that women are not inherently more pacifist than men, but that the experience of motherhood makes them more aware of the value of human beings, is typical of one line of thinking during the early part of the century. The focus on women and mothers as life givers and peace bringers, as displayed by the feminist thinker, Ellen Key, had its pitfalls, some of which West points out in her reviews. This recourse to essentialism is very close to patriarchy's view of womanhood. But, motherhood was also seen as potentially enabling. Sharon Ouditt deals usefully with the differing approaches of women to war and to their own roles, showing how apparently conservative positions could work in subversive

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[56]Woollacott, p. 130.

[57]A great deal of work has been done in this area. For early discussions of these issues, see Margaret Kamester and Jo Vellacott, eds., *Militarism versus Feminism* and Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911). More recent assessments of these differences include: Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson et al, eds., *Behind the Lines; Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), Sharon McDonald, Pat Holden and Shirley Ardener, eds., *Images of Women in Peace and War: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, 1987) and Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1993). Gilbert and Gubar and Jane Marcus also discuss these issues.

[58]See Margaret Kamester, p. 40.

ways. As she says: "the image of the silenced, domesticated nurturer is ... at the ideological junction of those conservative representations of women who fought for the war and radical women who fought against it".[59]

The split between the militant feminists and the non-militants over maternity and pacifism, and between those seeking absolute equality and those emphasising difference became another series of splits.[60] The sex-war, declared by the militants before the war took on a new dimension, as Longenbach suggests: "The Great War created not so much a turning point as an intensification of the war between women and men".[61] The men on the front had a growing sense of injustice at what they perceived to be the luxurious living of the non-combatant compared with the horrors they were enduring. In addition to this, their places in society were gradually being taken over by women. "The dichotomy of home and front led, finally to a situation whereby the soldiers on the line felt a greater sense of solidarity with Germans sitting across No Man's Land than with their compatriots at home".[62] Thus, while women were gaining some measure of equality in war work, there was a growing feeling of antagonism towards these achievements, prefiguring a vicious anti-feminist backlash after the war. This and the tendency towards 'separate sphere' policies led to a situation which "trapped women in the cult of domesticity from which earlier feminists had tried to free themselves".[63]

West's sense of transition in the light of these complex divisions and transformations at the time is hardly surprising. She captures this feeling of change in her review of a book

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[59]Ouditt, p. 89.

[60]Kingsley Kent labels equality feminism "old feminism" and the focus on sexual difference as "new feminism" (p. 241).

[61]Longenbach, p. 114.

[62]Kinsgley Kent, p. 248. There is a great deal of evidence of this antagonism in the war writings of men such as Sassoon and Aldington. The subject of sexual wounding and loss during the Great War has been dealt with in some detail, especially by Gilbert and Gubar in their first volume *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*.

[63]Olive Banks, p. 178.

suggestively entitled *Towards a Sane Feminism* in 1916. The very title evokes a sense of multiplicity within current feminist thought, and this is enhanced by West's own musing about variety and difference within women's movements:

> Turning over its pages is to look into the suffrage world as it was before August 1914. One sees passing before one the goloshes-and velour-hat type of suffragist who was very well up in facts and figures, but a little unsympathetic about changes in the marriage laws; the amber-cigarette-holder type of suffragette who called stridently across the Soho restaurant for the wine-list, and whose trump card was her speech on unmarried mothers; the stoutish type who affected purple djibbahs and spoke in a rich, almost greasy, contralto about the Mother Soul; the white-faced type whose courage in gaol was one of the few intimations of how we would meet our enemies.[64]

Fascinated by this diversity, West sought to explore the range of possibilities of independence for women and the constraints imposed by patriarchy and by women's own failures. The range of women she comments on during the pre-war years is extended during the war. Her writing about three positions: mothers, munitions workers and the idle "elegant" woman, deemed "the world's worst failure", suggest three different spaces women occupied in West's eyes. Her assessments of the mother, the woman worker and the passive, parasitic woman, cut across the divides of equal- and separate- sphere feminism. These analyses are not only central to an understanding of West's feminism at this time, but also to the context in which she conceived and wrote *The Return of the Soldier.*

Mothers, Munitions Workers and Parasitic Women

West's vigorous engagement in contemporary debates about motherhood at this time was motivated by immediate experience, rather than mere theory, as is evident in "The Sentinel" and her pre-war journalism. Her experience of motherhood in a war-time situation provided important material for articles such as "Women of England" (*Atlantic Monthly,*

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[64] *Daily News* 17 November, 1916, *YRB*, p. 330.

January 1916). Ironically, and rather usefully, an article by West's "bête noire", Ellen Key, appears in the same journal some months later. In this article, "War and the Sexes", Key demonstrates all the features West had railed against in a number of reviews. Here she considers the problem of loss of partners and children for the surplus women left without husbands after the war. For Key, these roles are the defining features of womanhood. West never sentimentalises motherhood in this way, noting that "[I]t is an inarticulate testimony that the Victorians were wrong, and that a woman is more and not less valuable as a worker because of the slight permanent glow of sympathy which accompanies her capacity for motherhood".[65] West describes this essentialist notion of difference as "a quite unjustifiable assumption that every woman who has had a child has reached thereby a nobility unattainable by any man".[66] West finds this not only misguided but dangerous, and she subsequently attacks Key's pacifism on this basis.[67] At the same time, West admits that the primitive element in her role as mother was exaggerated by war-time: "This was motherhood with a difference, when the mists of chloroform cleared away and they held out her squealing son, she looked at him, not with the passive contentment of the mother in peace-time, but with the active and passionate intention: 'I must keep this thing safe'".[68] West's discourse on motherhood resembles that of her mentor, Olive Schreiner, and although the idea is not articulated here, Schreiner's sense that women's experience of motherhood makes her a more natural peace-maker because woman "always knows what she is doing and the value of the life she takes",[69] lies beneath the surface. Thus, in this article, the experience of motherhood is an experience of difference, but at the same time, it is a difference which does not exclude

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[65]"Women of England", p. 2.

[66]*Daily New*, 25 March 1915, *YRB*, p. 298.

[67]West had attacked Key earlier in a satirical article entitled "Eroto-Priggery" (*New Republic*, 13 March, 1915), pp. 150-152. Again, she tackles Key on her emphasis on the need to cultivate "womanly" qualities for the purposes of wedded life and the production of children.

[68]"Women of England", p. 7.

[69]Schreiner, p. 176.

participation in public life. This is illustrated in West's "tale"[70] about the mother who suffers the restrictions of war, but also a sense of liberation and usefulness in having to look after billeted soldiers. The revelation of the possibility of rewarding work outside the nursery is of course central to West's feminism: "'I must go on doing something useful after the war: one needs it'; she registered it as one of the emotions that respectable people act upon".[71] Her war work was a revelation of alternative fulfilment which could co-exist with and even surpass the "fulfilment" of motherhood. Thus, in her narrative of women in war-time, of the separation and yet possible co-existence of the private and public spheres, West embraces both the theories of equality and difference.

West considers the problem of the equality/separate spheres distinction and resolves it in her witty review of Ellis's *Essays in Wartime*:

> But here Mr Ellis rather misreads the grievance of the feminist. She is not really disposed to dispute that the balance of her ductless glands is not the same as a man's; one so rarely meets them that it hardly matters. But she does feel angry when an employer (presumably on account of the different balance of her ductless glands) pays a woman six-pence an hour for skilled work in an aeroplane factory for which a man working at the same speed was paid a shilling an hour. We will be as different as Mr Ellis likes, but we are not going to lose money over it.[72]

She does not relinquish her earlier feminist and socialist demands for equal work and equal pay. Difference should not mean inequality. The war becomes for West an act of revelation of the consequences of difference, of "the peculiarly unsatisfying position of women in

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[70]This story, almost functioning as an allegory, is inserted into a general discussion of the effects of war on ordinary women. It is a fictionalised rendering of her own life experiences of the time. West refers to these events in a letter to Sylvia Lynd: "First I was requisitioned by Lord Kitchener to cook for eleven men who were billeted in an empty house near me at Braughing. My steaks became so popular that the eleven men became attached to me and were a permanent feature of my front garden. This was not good for work and brought many distractions" (Autumn 1915, Tulsa Archive). This letter and gloss appears in Bonnie Kime Scott's forthcoming edition of selected West letters.

[71]"Women of England", p. 10.

[72]*Daily News* 20 December 1916, *YRB*, p. 335.

England before the war".[73] In her review of May Sinclair's *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, she takes up again the frustrating position of women excluded from the public sphere. May Sinclair went over to Belgium with an ambulance corps and found herself utterly unable to gain access to the war zone itself, since it was a solid male preserve. West speaks of the book as "a record of humiliations" and concludes: "and yet every page of this gallant, humiliated book makes it plain that while it is glorious that England should have women who walk quietly under the rain of bullets it is glorious too that England should have women who grieve inconsolably because the face of danger has not been turned to them".[74] The frustration of exclusion was a sentiment expressed by many, most notoriously in Rose Macaulay's poem "Many Sisters to Many Brothers" - "Oh it's you that have the luck, out there in blood and muck".[75]

But West also portrays another aspect of the effects of war on women in which they are seen to gain a measure of equality with the fighting men. In a series of articles written for the *Daily Chronicle* in 1916, she documents her visits to munitions factories and comments on the significance of women's involvement in the war in this way.[76] Her experience of seeing the munitions factories was a revelation of the possible equality attainable for women through work and through war. In three articles, entitled "Hands that War" and subtitled "The Cordite Makers", "Welfare Work" and "The Night Shift", West describes "a new form of national service for women".[77] In all three articles, she is at pains

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[73]Rebecca West, "The Agony of the Human Soul in War. Miss Vera Brittain's Vivid Testimony", *Daily Telegraph*, 15 September 1933, p. 6.

[74]*Daily News* 24 August, 1915, *YRB*, p. 307.

[75]Qtd from Catherine Reilly's introduction to *Scars Upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (London: Virago, 1981), p. xxxv.

[76]West also wrote two articles for *The New Republic* on similar subjects. The titles for these articles are particularly interesting in the light of her many articles on motherhood: "Mothering the Munition-Maker I: The Voluntary Worker", *The New Republic* October 6, 1917, pp. 266-269 and "Mothering the Munition-Maker II: The Welfare Worker", *The New Republic* October 13, 1917, pp. 298-300).

[77]*YRB*, p. 386.

to highlight the endurance and dedication of the girls working in the factories, and also the dangers they faced. For her, these women are living under conditions which almost mirror those of men, "Surely, never before in modern history can women have lived a life so completely parallel to that of the regular Army",[78] while the dangers they face in handling volatile explosives are greater than "any soldier on home defence has seen since the beginning of the war".[79] In her responses, West is close to the views of the militant feminists for whom the suffragette army had taken on a new enemy. In West's eyes, "The women are among the comfortingly significant features that emerge from the purposeless welter of war. They are assets to England, they introduce reason and sympathy into the snarling colloquy of labour and capital; and they mark that industry has at last recognised that women have brains as well as hands".[80] In the much later *War Nurse*, she makes a very interesting analogy between the dangers of women's war work in the form of nursing, and the dangers in the trenches. The heroine, Corinne Andrews, rips her uterus trying to lift a wounded soldier. The considerations of her lover's response to this form of injury ("It happened to a good many nurses in the war"[81]) are significant: "He would take my misadventure as a proof of the thoroughly unsatisfactory, rickety nature of the female, though what had happened to me was the exact equivalent to a wound sustained by a man in active service".[82] Again, West's interest is in equivalence and difference: the wounds vary, the dangers might be different but they can be endured equally by both sexes. West's evocations both of the triumphs and the humiliations of women during this period reveal her understanding of the complexity and significance of the changes, negative and positive, that women faced during

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[78] *YRB*, p. 382.
[79] *YRB*, p. 383.
[80] *Daily Chronicle* 1916, *YRB*, p. 386.
[81] *War Nurse*, p. 198.
[82] *War Nurse*, p. 201.

the war.

West's discussion of motherhood and the woman worker provides an important contrast with her analysis of the elegant woman defined as "the world's worst failure", the third "representation" of women to figure in West's war-time writing. Woman as the "world's worst failure" is an extension of West's theme of the parasitic woman in her earlier journalism. For this concept she was indebted to Olive Schreiner's definition: "In place of the active labouring woman, upholding society by her toil, has come the effete wife, concubine or prostitute, clad in fine raiment, the work of others' fingers".[83] West uses the metaphor of elegance in order to analyse ways in which women *become* "feminine", that is, passive consumers. The idea of elegance, not only as feminine mystique but also masquerade and false consciousness, is central to the sequences of articles in this series, written for *The New Republic* in 1916. The first article bears the title "The World's Worst Failure" I ,[84] and the four subsequent pieces retain this title with varying sub-titles; "The Schoolmistress" II (January 22, 1916), "The Woman in Industry" III (February 5, 1916), "The Woman without Fortitude" IV (February 19, 1916) and "Scarlet Berries" VI (sic) (March 4, 1916).

Throughout the series, West analyses "femininity" or the elegance system from a variety of angles and perspectives: through a reading of evolution, as a construct which operates across the classes, through women's education, and as a consequence of the industrial revolution. Most specifically in relation to the context of women and war, the creation of femininity is described as a direct response to masculinity.[85] The first article in the series is especially significant, not only because it sets up the central themes for the whole

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[83]Olive Schreiner, *Women and Labour*, p. 81

[84]January 8, 1916, rpt. in *The Gender of Modernism*, pp. 580-583. Page references to quotations from the first article are from *The Gender of Modernism* anthology.

[85]The focus on the "World's Worst Failure" here is specifically in relation to war and masculinity. In Chapter 6, I will consider the series from a broader perspective, as a turning point in West's feminism.

series, but also because West was to test and elaborate on these theories in her novel, *The Return of the Soldier*. The article focuses on the loveliness and yet emptiness of a Frenchwoman that the narrator meets in a hotel in Maidenhead during the war.[86] Through her acquaintance with this woman, whose purpose in life is to strike "a note of the highest possible pitch of physical refinement" (p. 580), the narrator perceives the connection between the cultivation of femininity and violence.

> Yet she was an achievement as delicate, as deliberately selective of the soft and gracious things, as difficult a piece of craftsmanship, as a Conder fan. Her body was not the loosely articulated thing of arrested and involuntary movements that serves as the fleshly vehicle of most of us, but was very straight and still, with the grace of flowers arranged by a florist, within a dress so beautiful that one imagined it hard and permanent like a jewel, yet so supple of texture that one could have crushed it into a handful. It was the aim of her fragility to rouse such thoughts of violence. (p. 580)

It is exactly this link between fragility and violence, between "womanliness" and "manliness" that Woolf explores in *Three Guineas*. Of the daughter of an educated man, she writes, "It was with a view to marriage that her body was educated; a maid was provided for her; that the streets were shut to her; that the fields are shut to her; that solitude was denied her - all this was enforced upon her in order that she might preserve her body intact for her husband".[87] This artificial cultivation of fragility imposed by men on women and, for West, perpetuated by women themselves, leads not only to serious imbalances in society, to a loss of independence and individuality, but to violence as well. As Michele Barrett suggests, "Militarism and fascism were bound in with men's insistence that women restrict themselves to serving the needs of fathers, husbands and families, and subject themselves to the often unreasonable demands of men".[88] This vicious cycle of the cultivation of fragility or

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[86]West describes this visit to Maidenhead in a letter to Sylvia Lynd: "Then I went, full of a romantic idea that all rivers were clean and cool, to Maidenhead which turned out to be a Yoshiwara [a brothel area in Tokyo] covered in geraniums" (Autumn 1915, Tulsa Archive).

[87]Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. Michele Barrett, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 159-160.

[88]Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p. xxviii.

femininity for the purposes of upholding masculinity has another double bind. If women are to be so obsessed with the artificial preservation of their beauty, this becomes an end in itself and the male becomes obsolete anyway. In West's article, the beautiful Frenchwoman hardly laments the death of her husband in the war, and only feels the loss of her lover's money and thus his offer of marriage as a loss of her purpose in life: "*Figurez-vous*, my husband is killed in the war, and by the same post I hear that my lover has lost all his money and can no longer marry me" (p. 582). In the same way, the amnesiac Chris Baldry in *The Return of the Soldier* is of no use to Kitty if he cannot recognise her beauty and femininity, which he must have once encouraged.

Significantly, the Frenchwoman suffers from neurasthenia, a disease initially defined in the late-nineteenth century as particularly affecting middle-class women. "Like hysteria, neurasthenia encompassed a wide range of symptoms from blushing, vertigo, headaches and neuralgia to insominia, depression, and uterine irritability", and "neurasthenics were thought to be cooperative, ladylike, and well-bred".[89] But the First World War revealed a male equivalent to neurasthenia - - shell-shock, which also had class-related symptoms. As Showalter points out, "neurasthenic symptoms, such as nightmares, insomnia, heart palpitations, dizziness, depression, or disorientation, were more common among officers ... For officers in particular, the pressures to conform to British ideals of manly stoicism were extreme".[90] For the Frenchwoman, whose identity is dependent on her femininity and on her being an object of the male gaze, the absence of that gaze leads to a breakdown, to neurasthenia. She shares these symptoms not only with Kitty in *The Return of the Soldier*, but also with Chris Baldry, who breaks under the code of masculinity in the trenches and

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[89]Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 134.
[90]Showalter, p. 174.

suffers extreme memory loss. All three are victims who perpetuate the cultivation of masculinity and femininity in the name of the elegance system.

West extends her analysis across class and social institutions later in the series. In "The Woman in Industry", she considers the consequence of the elegance system for working-class women in a time of war, and in "The Woman Without Fortitude", she describes the cultivation of elegance through an oblique portrayal of a brothel in wartime London. In "The Woman in Industry", the narrator describes two women from Manchester who visit her house in the country, where she caters for billeted soldiers. The inability of the women to share in the vitality of the countryside, and even of the soldiers themselves, is attributed to their complicity in the elegance system: "The only piece of morality which women seem to have worked out for themselves is that on all occasions one should preserve the integrity of one's silk stockings".[91] Although she supports women's right to work and independence, West notes that "these women were paying too heavy a price for this simple victory of justice, for they were giving their blood and the pleasures that rich-blooded people find in the world, and a deeper thing beside. For they never bear healthy children that are certain to live and themselves bear children".[92] The ill-effects of sweated industries for women are exacerbated by the ill-effects of convention, in the form of the women's insistence on cultivating their femininity: "Here again was the instinct for elegance. The girl sat in the mean living-room and worked long hours at an unorganized trade because, although her body rotted daily in the darkness and poverty, she could yet retain that film of disuse which is known as her virginal bloom".[93] These women are failures, not only because they

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[91]"The Woman in Industry", *The New Republic*, p. 15.

[92]West's reference to motherhood and healthy children alludes to general discussions at the time about fears over degeneration and the health of the race. "This emphasis was reinforced by the influential ideas of eugenists: good motherhood was an essential component in their ideology of racial health and purity" (Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", p. 12).

[93]"The Woman in Industry", *The New Republic*, p. 16.

allow themselves to be exploited by capitalistic practices, according to West, but also because they are devitalised by their submission to the elegance system. Lifeless, even in comparison with the ghosts of dead soldiers evoked in the article, these women anticipate the ruin of the girl in "The Woman Without Fortitude". This article differs stylistically from the others. It is couched in a dream narrative which becomes a parable, perhaps because of the subject of the article - prostitution in war-time. Here, the young girl in the dream sequence is unable to muster the strength to defend herself in the face of the enemy because her education, based on "the Book of the Seven and Seventy Delights of Love", is debilitating and inadequate. In comparison with the courage and endurance of women munitions workers described in other West articles, the young girl has neither the strength to protect her purity or moral integrity, nor the determination to kill herself in the face of certain rape: "she knew that it was her duty to raise the sword that dangled so heavy from her wrist and press its point into her breast".[94] Weakened by another form of economic exploitation and by her particular training, the prostitute is the ultimate symbol of the failure of femininity and the consequences of the elegance system. In the context of war, an extreme manifestation of masculinity, West offers a variety of examples of the way in which women perpetuate feminine stereotypes through a system which ultimately victimizes both sexes.

Ann Surma suggests that: "West's fictional texts rehearse all manner of the female/femaleness (she often interchanges the terms), feminine and sexuality, and the various means by which female characters make a mission of seeking a position and holding on to it for all they are *worth*".[95] This many-sided assessment of terms associated with her definitions of "woman" can be applied to her non-fiction, also. West's attacks on men and patriarchy are always balanced by equally critical attacks on women. The reason for this is

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[94]"The Woman Without Fortitude", *The New Republic*, p. 73.
[95]Surma, p. 202.

made clear throughout West's writing, but perhaps most succinctly expressed in an essay written just after the end of the war and after the achievement of a partial franchise for women. In this essay, while acknowledging differences between men and women, for biological, cultural and historical reasons, West never allows that difference to disguise what she sees as human error or even evil. "Without doubt", she writes, "women will be able to represent snobbery, prejudice, the desire to gain a simulacrum of true power by the cheap means of persecuting weak and unhappy classes or peoples, just as well as men have done".[96] Thus, the attack from the inside, starting with the parasitic woman and extending into other failings of women as well, becomes a consistent concern. The celebration of the woman worker, the ambivalent portrayal of motherhood, differing responses to women and war and strong criticisms of aspects of "femininity", are all aspects of West's feminism. As Surma says, "West's texts perform in different voices"[97] and it is this multi-voiced response to the period which expresses the richness and diversity of its debates, as well as conveying the complexity of her own ideas.

West's multi-voiced response appears in a variety of forms - through her insistent references to Henry James and other prominent literary figures of the day, through her appreciative reportage of women's war work and through the fictionalising of her own expreiences as a mother and a non-combatant. In her novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, West attempted to channel these many voices into the complex narrative form she had found in James and Ford Madox Ford, and wished to develop according to her own feminist and aesthetic needs.

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[96]Rebecca West, "Women as Brainworkers" in *Women and the Labour Party*, ed. Dr Marion Philips, (London: Headly Bros, Publisher, 1919), pp. 57-65.

[97]Surma, p. 240.

Chapter Five

The Return of the Soldier: "Women of England"

The 1918 reviews of West's novel set the tone both for contemporary and later responses: the review in *The New Statesman* is subtitled "A Love Story",[1] categorising it as "sentimental", popular or light literature and therefore not to be taken very seriously. In 1973 in the *Times Literary Supplement*, it was referred to as "a woman's war novel"[2] and even Claire Tylee, a more sympathetic critic, concludes, "Presumably *The Return of the Soldier* has continued to please because of its genteel snobbery, its nostalgia for an innocent, romantic love that transgressed class-barriers, and its final endorsement of the institution of marriage".[3] The 1918 *TLS* review is typical of a great deal of criticism with regard to women writers and war. It notes that the novel is full of "spun fantasies that were neither real nor possible, though the writer might delude herself that she had drawn a portrait of an authentic soldier".[4] The resentment of women writing about what was perceived to be an essentially male domain is typical of the period. In response to these and later hostile reactions, not only to West's novel but to a great deal of women's writing of that time, recent feminist criticism has reassessed the status of women writers in relation to the Great War, and also to the sentimental novel.

The description of a novel as "a woman's novel"[5] carries all kinds of critical

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[1]No. 11, 22 June 1918, p. 235.

[2]*TLS* 1973: 1553, qtd in Claire Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64*, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1990), p. 142.

[3]Tylee, p. 181.

[4]Qtd from Harold Orel's *Popular Fiction in England 1914-1918* (London; New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 172.

[5]Hilary Radner gives a useful definition of "the woman's novel": "The woman's novel says, by and large, what it means to say, refusing to reveal its secrets under the scrutiny of the analyst by displaying these last for all to see, literati and nonliterati alike. Yet the richness of its language, the subtlety of its arguments, and its undeniable intelligence and self-consciousness defy the classification of popular culture. The woman's novel may be read either as popular culture or as literature, challenging the categories of High Modernism, reflecting the ambiguous social position of its preferred reader - the educated woman". ("Exiled from Within: The

implications. Traditionally, this label has classified a novel as a "romance" - - low-brow, popular and sentimental. The "sentimental novel" or "romance novel" is another area that has been reassessed in recent feminist criticism. Critics such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis see the modernist novel, and in particular the female modernist novel breaking with the romance tradition. Du Plessis suggests, with reference to Woolf's texts, that "[T]o criticize plots - especially the love-interest plot - was to criticize the cultural and narrative forces that produced women". [6] Other critics such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Joseph Allan Boone pursue similar arguments, showing how the break from a traditional model serves to create new kinds of narrative forms.[7] Such perspectives are helpful when considering West's choice of narrative approaches for her novel. But the idea of the sentimental has not been entirely dismissed from feminist criticism; in fact, for some critics such as Suzanne Clarke, the sentimental can be simultaneously banal and transgressive.[8] Sharon Ouditt also draws on alternative views of "the woman's novel" to read West's texts, showing how such dismissive labelling conceals spaces for further expansion and exploration. The dismissal of the "woman's novel" was not only a rejection of the domestic sphere, a domain women had been forced to inhabit, but a condemnation of women writers and readers alike.

In approaching West's novel, I do not wish to focus upon it exclusively as a war

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Woman's Novel" in Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram eds., *Women's Writing in Exile*, Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989, p. 256).

[6]DuPlessis, p. 56.

[7]Susan Stanford Friedman, "Lyric Subversion of Narrative in Women's Writing: Virginia Woolf and the Tyranny of Plot" in James Phelan ed., *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989); Joseph Allen Boone,*Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[8]*Sentimental Modernism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 8. Other critics who endorse and expand on this view are Leslie W. Rabine *Reading the Romantic Heroine: Text, History, Ideology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), Jean Radford *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1986) and Janice Radway *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina University Press, 1984).

novel or to debate what kind of war novel it might be,[9] nor to consider it merely as a romance with subversive tendencies. But the range of discussion of these areas will provide an important resource for my own reading. What I would like to suggest, drawing particularly on West's article, "Women of England", is that *The Return of the Soldier* can be seen as a precursor to Virginia Woolf's feminist modernist practice of writing ordinary women's lives. Woolf articulates her position most famously in *A Room of One's Own,* where she declares:

> All these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded, I said, addressing Mary Carmichael as if she were present; and went on in thought through the streets of London feeling in imagination the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life...For in imagination I had gone into a shop; it was laid with black and white paving; it was hung, astonishingly beautifully, with coloured ribbons. Mary Carmichael might well have a look at that in passing, I thought, for it is a sight that would lend itself to the pen as fittingly as any snowy peak or rocky gorge in the Andes.[10]

By writing about women at home, West undertakes this very project. For, as she says, the domestic world of women's lives "goes unrecorded partly because they are the sex bred to inarticulateness, and partly because, when one thinks of women in wartime, the exceptional people come forward as usual to crowd out the rest of mankind".[11] In this article, West takes on the role of Mary Carmichael in 1916, stating that "Middle-class housewives are not likely to write their own history; and so for the past few months I have been collecting the experiences of women who lived in quiet England and yet found existence defaced by the war".[12] West's choice of subject in "Women of England" is motivated by a sense of class consciousness, and gender awareness too. Her subject is the middle-class woman because "It is the middle-class home - so largely dependent on the

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[9]Claire Tylee suggests that the novel in one way endorses the war, whilst Marcus asserts: "Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *Jacob's Room* and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* are already being read as classic feminist antiwar novels. Their distinguishing feature is the insertion of class into the narrative of war and gender". (Jane Marcus,"Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War" in Helen M. Cooper ed., p. 137).

[10]Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p. 81.

[11]"Women of England", p. 1.

[12]"Women of England", p. 6.

distributive system which has so entirely broken down for lack of men - that has tumbled down like a house of cards".[13] Significantly, West's sense in 1916 that the shock waves of the war were registered most immediately and strongly by the middle classes has only recently become of interest to feminist criticism and women's war writing.[14] Setting the story around women such as Jenny who sees herself, "like most Englishwomen of my time [I was] wishing for the return of a soldier" (*RS*, p. 13), West concentrates on the average experience of the middle-class women, sitting at home and waiting. By foregrounding women at home, West not only creates another side to the picture of war, but also sets up a traditionally assigned space for reinterpretation. As Margaret R. Higonnet suggests: "By accepting but reevaluating their traditional assignment to a domestic literary economy and domestic knowledge, women can recast the cost/benefit analysis of war".[15] West's concentration on middle-class women in a domestic setting not only questions the cost/benefit of war, but of society as it has operated and still operates, a society divided not only by sex but by class. And the division between the sexes is fragmented further by a division within - women can be separated from each other by class consciousness, jealousy and selfishness.

In her *Atlantic Monthly* article West clearly explains her reasons for setting her novel away from the front, away from women who became nurses and munitions workers, and in the highly domestic world of Baldry Court as well as around Margaret Grey's more squalid suburban life. At the same time, she is concerned to illustrate the tragic impact of the war which functions in the novel as a dire instrument of change, an uncompassionate truth-teller. West concedes in the same article that "we little private people ... have lately endured many

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[13]"Women of England", p. 6.

[14]See Angela Woollacott, "Sisters and Brothers in Arms: Family, Class, and Gendering in World War I Britain" in *Gendering War Talk.*

[15]"Not So Quiet In No-Woman's-Land", *Gendering War Talk*, p. 221.

experiences and found them to be revelations that we could never have received in the grossish times of peace that lay on the land before August".[16] In the light of this remark, I would like to consider the novel as part of West's own attempt to write about the unrecorded ordinary lives of three women in particular, but also in relation to the decentralised and emasculated hero, Chris Baldry. This consideration will be divided into two parts, the first investigating the characters as types already implicit in West's non-fiction (except Chris Baldry, who is a new phenomenon, not only to West's fiction but to all war writing at the time), defined by and defining their domestic spaces. Secondly, I will examine these characters within their larger domestic setting, the tradition of the "country house" novel and West's rewriting of this literary tradition.

In presenting Jenny and Kitty as two women who have learnt to see themselves and their role in society through the eyes of a man who, in his shell-shocked state, refuses to recognise them, West is drawing on her various portraits of "the world's worst failure" to present both critically and sympathetically the plight of women whose identities, so bound up with patriarchy, are besieged and crumbling. West's Fabian friend, S.K. Ratcliffe in his letter to her of 1928 after seeing the play version of the novel, describes his reaction in exactly these terms: "the odd thing I felt was that it was and must be, a dreadful exhibition of the woman's dependence in our wretched society on the minority man. Here are three women, all with quality, living in one man, and all being done out of things" (Yale Archive). At the same time, Jenny, whose status as spinster and surplus woman victimises her further, learns to see things more clearly through the guidance of Margaret, and ironically through Chris's own trauma. Although there are no easy solutions offered, Jenny's learning experience and consequent heightened awareness, open up some possibilities.

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[16]"Women of England", p. 11.

Kitty is the simplest figure to emerge from West's non-fiction, being most obviously a version of "the world's worst failure". She lacks Jenny's sensitivity and self-consciousness which might have enabled her to transcend her self-perpetuating status as an object of beauty and desire. As Ann Surma points out in her discussion of the relation between art, women and beauty in West's novels, "In the fictional texts, women's power to change their conventionally identifiable positions is restricted by their perception as commodified object bodies, powerless forms".[17] Like the statue of the white nymph Kitty has recently acquired, her function is purely decorative. She aligns herself more closely with this precious object by appearing before Chris in her wedding gown: "There were green curtains close by, and now the lights on her satin gown were green like cleft ice. She looked cold as moonlight, as virginity but precious; the falling candlelight struck her hair to bright, pure gold" (*RS*, p. 57). The language Jenny uses to describe her suggests something crafted and jewel-like, valuable but lacking in warmth and animation. The china nymph is described as crouching on hands and knees, "her small head intently drooped to the white flowers that floated on the black waters all around her" (*RS*, p. 117), a feminised Narcissus engrossed in the craftedness of her own body. It is only as an object of beauty to be validated by the male gaze that Kitty has an identity, and therefore, none at all. Jenny makes this point about herself as well as Kitty, during her many reappraisals of their situation. All their lives they have functioned as mirrors in which Chris could gaze and gather a comforting picture of himself: "It had lain on us, as the responsibility that gave us dignity, to compensate him for his lack of free adventure by arranging him a gracious life" (*RS*, p. 21). They are merely flat surfaces of glass, they have no other form of identity or individuality. Kitty's identity is especially brittle, and the impact of Chris's return and Margaret's appearance is as shattering as if the ornamental

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[17]Surma, p. 216.

nymph itself had been dropped. At first statuesque and sculptured, Kitty becomes like "a broken doll" (*RS*, p. 125), unable to rediscover herself in the unappreciative eyes of her husband and unable to understand his own predicament. In fact, Kitty so needs to be an object for Chris, that she sacrifices his happiness to restore that status for herself. By exposing a version of "the world's worst failure" to one of the brutal consequences of manliness, the war, West highlights the hollowness and worthlessness of this form of womanliness. As Jenny phrases it, "we are as we are and there is nothing more to us. The whole truth about us lies in our material seeming" (*RS*, p. 137).[18]

Chris's cousin Jenny is a more complex version of "the world's worst failure", made more so since it is through her initially clouded perception that the entire story is presented.[19] Unlike Kitty, whose position as wife confers a certain status and identity in middle-class society, Jenny is single and her unrequited love for Chris suggests that she will remain so. As a spinster and mere cousin, Jenny has no status at all in that society; her only role at Baldry Court seems to have been to maintain the facade and falseness. As Tylee points out: "Unmarried women are also parasites. Like the lower-class man (represented by Margaret's husband, William), the single woman is neutralised".[20] The spinster, like the parasitic woman, features in West's pre-war non-fiction. In a provocative review for *The Freewoman*, West defined the spinster in response to D.H. Lawrence's *The Trespasser*:

> The spinster, looking out on the world through the drawn curtains of the boarding-school or the equally celibate, boarding-house, sees men as trees walking - large, dignified, almost majestic. Like Helena, she refuses to see their helplessness, their pathetic defeats in the strife against circumstance and

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[18]There is an interesting resonance here between West's text and Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm.* Jenny's words seem to echo Lyndall's claim that society has constructed the two sexes differently: "To you it says - *Work*! and to us it says - *Seem*!" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 154.

[19]As Margaret Stetz observes: "West's chief debt [is] to James, who taught a generation of writers the importance of point of view. To discuss *The Return of the Soldier* without giving proper attention to its central consciousness, that of the narrator, Jenny, is to make nonsense of the book" ("Drinking 'The Wine of Truth'", pp. 63-63).

[20]Tylee, p. 149.

temperament. Perpetually she conceives them as masters of the situation.[21]

Reacting to a reader's attack on her definition, West clarified her postition in a later issue of *The Freewoman*: "spinsterhood is not necessarily a feminine quality. It is simply the limitation of experience to one's own sex, and consequently the regard of the other sex from an idealist point of view".[22] In West's terms, Jenny can certainly be defined as a spinster, not because she is unmarried, but because of the way in which she has idealised Chris and founded her identity on that idealism. The return of the injured soldier and the consequent intrusion of Margaret forces Jenny to re-assess her position constantly. At the beginning of the narrative she describes life at Baldry Court with self-satisfied security, asserting of Chris that "there never was so visibly contented a man" (*RS*, p. 16). By the end she admits that: "Nothing and everything was wrong" (*RS*, p. 167). Jenny's learning process, similar to, although not as complex as Strether's (in Henry James, *The Ambassadors*), or John Dowell's in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, is central to the development of the novel.

Jenny's learning process involves a re-negotiation of her identity, in which she gradually shifts her allegiance from the values she had falsely identified in Chris to the values she feels Margaret represents.[23] Her initial abhorrence of Margaret, shared with Kitty, is transformed to near worship. At first, Jenny is only able to relate to Margaret from a superior class and economic position: "I pushed the purse away from me with my toe and and hated her as the rich hate the poor, as insect things that will struggle out of the crannies which are their decent home, and introduce ugliness to the light of day" (*RS*, p. 32). Margaret's generosity and love reveal to Jenny that value does not reside in material aspects, their wealth

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[21]"Spinsters and Art", *The Freewoman* 11 July 1912, *YRB*, p. 46.

[22]"Letter to the Editor of *The Freewoman*", *The Freewoman* 1 August, 1912, *YRB*, p. 48.

[23]Margaret Stetz's discussion of Jenny's learning process is useful: West "wishes to present, through the filter of her narrator's consciousness, an account of the difficulty of reconciling one's innate desire for comfort with one's intellectual awareness of the hardships and dangers of life" (Stetz, "Drinking 'The Wine of Truth'", p. 71).

and immaculate appearance. In learning these things, Jenny nevertheless mystifies Margaret's poverty:

> And so I could believe of Margaret that her determined dwelling in places where there was not enough of anything, her continued exposure of herself to the grime of squalid living, was unconsciously deliberate. The deep internal thing that had guided Chris to forgetfulness had guided her to poverty so that when the time came for her meeting with her lover there should be not one intimation of the beauty of suave flesh to distract him from the message of her soul. (*RS*, p. 146)

In replacing a series of falsehoods with what she sees as the truth, that truth itself becomes distorted by her own sentimentalising vision. Nevertheless, her gradual recognition of Margaret's goodness and inner beauty creates the possibility of forming a new identity and new allegiances. At the end of the novel there is a very important scene after Margaret and Jenny have come to a mutual agreement that "the truth's the truth". The women take leave of each other, kissing "not as women, but as lovers do; I think we each embraced that part of Chris the other had absorbed by her love" (*RS*, p. 184). At the end of the novel, Jenny turns away from the conventional to the life-giving generosity of Margaret's womanhood, while confronting at the same time her illusion "that a wise and benevolent woman would be able to defeat the world".[24] Margaret cannot "save" Chris, she can only show him the truth. As Sharon Ouditt says: "If the predominent cultural values have not been changed, they have at least been exposed. In losing Chris, Jenny can embrace Margaret. This gesture has implications for a female solidarity which offers hope for the deconstruction of the male order".[25]

The depiction of Margaret has created the greatest problems for feminist critics because her maternal and restorative characteristics verge on a conventional and essentialist portrayal. But West wrote about motherhood, both with contempt for its sentimentalisation

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[24]Stetz, p. 76.
[25]Ouditt, p. 116.

by feminists such as Ellen Key, and with recognition of the instinct it generates for protection and nurturing. Margaret's maternal qualities have been seen by critics as both reductive and enabling. As Ouditt says: "This image of spiritualised maternal love on one level reduces the woman to a healing womb, but on another suggests a register of communication/communion unavailable to the frigid Kitty".[26] There is another way to approach West's depiction of Margaret, reading West's use of the maternal and the restorative as inverting traditional associations of passivity and servitude. Margaret bears a close resemblance to Olive Schreiner's vision of women whose wisdom is greater because as mothers, they knows the cost of human flesh. Most interesting is Schreiner's view that "Men's bodies are as women's works of art".[27] The traditionally passive and submissive role of child-bearing is turned into an authorative and powerful act of creation. West extends this idea in her treatment of the "elegant" woman who refuses that power by acquiescing to male desire. In "Scarlet Berries", West makes a statement which anticipates one made by Jenny in the novel where she states that "the woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time" (*RS*, p. 144). In the article, she writes: "Nor do the arms of the elegant woman carry her lover's child more safely than his soul, for she is altogether at odds with life and will not bear burdens at its will".[28] Thus, the "carrying" of the lover, which Margaret literally does ("I saw her arms brace him under the armpits with a gesture that was not passionate, but rather the movement of one carrying a wounded man from under fire", *RS*, pp. 122-3), is not an act of submission to male desire. It is a sign of strength and autonomy arising from the very source of the self.

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[26]Ouditt, p. 113.
[27]Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*, p. 174.
[28]"Scarlet Berries", *The New Republic*, p. 127).

Margaret relates to Chris Baldry in three ways: as lover, as mother and, as Judith Meyer suggests, as his double: "To Chris, Margaret is the 'essential' (and therefore untested) self of which the war has deprived him and which can provide him refuge in forgetfulness".[29] Their love relationship is part of their memory of the past, the retelling of which offers up a contrast with the coldness between Kitty and Chris; it can be seen to offer "a pathway to a vision of an alternative value system preferable to that dominated by the war".[30] It is interesting that throughout the novel, Jenny often refers to Chris as if he were younger: "it is hard to remember that she is his contemporary, not a mother speaking of a young boy",[31] while Margaret's meeting with Chris is more like a mother/son reunion than that of old lovers. It is her maternal strength and wisdom which restores sleep and peacefulness to the disoriented soldier and peace of mind to Jenny, which she sees as Margaret's "private gift to me" (*RS*, p. 146). What is interesting about Margaret's relationship with Chris in this context of son and of double is his renunciation of his higher status in patriarchal and hierarchical terms. As son, he is rendered dependent on Margaret, and as double, he is feminised. The perceived "feminised" state of the shell-shocked soldier has been well documented by critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Elaine Showalter. What is significant in West's text, as Showalter points out, is her grasp of "the connections between male hysteria and a whole range of male social obligations" which go beyond contemporary analysts such as W.H.R Rivers. [32] By remembering only a young love relationship in the past, Chris is attempting to recapture an innocent state, one denied to him by the masculine duties of family business and

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[29]Judith Marie Meyer, "'Comrade-Twin': Brothers and doubles in the World War I Prose of May Sinclair, Katharine Anne Porter, Vera Brittain, Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf", (PhD Thesis, University of Washington, 1985), p. 137.

[30]Ouditt, p. 90.

[31]Stetz, p. 66.

[32]Showalter, *The Female Malady,* p. 191. See also Showalter's "Rivers - Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties", in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds., Margaret Higonnet et al.,. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

then the war. His suppression of memory is a rejection of all the implications and injuries of masculinity.

Chris's amnesia has been the topic of much discussion. In 1923 the novel was described as "a fictional exposition of the Freudian wish",[33] an often reductive approach which survives in contemporary readings of her work. Although she was not the first writer to create the character of a shell-shocked soldier, and despite her insistence in a letter of 1928 that the psychoanalysis in the story was introduced as an unimportant technical device,[34] her use of the amnesiac condition and the psycho-analytic specialist is important and moving. That she knew more about Freud than she lets on in her 1928 letter is revealed in a book review of 1917. Commenting on Freud's *Wit and the Relation to the Unconsciousness*, she writes:

> he has shown before in his work in psychopathology, which has had such an enormously stimulating effect on contemporary thought by its insistence that the dominant factors of the psychic life reside in the unconscious and that the conscious processes are only imperfect and frequently dissimulative indications of the unconscious processes...[35]

West's reference to Freud's earlier work suggests a knowledge of it, and she is obviously interested in this as the latest of his discussions. But the scene in the novel where Dr Gilbert Anderson discusses the processes of memory repression and seemingly rehearses Freudian discourse, contains a greater interest in its definitions of sanity and insanity, definitions which were similarly questioned in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Margaret's recognition that a

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[33]Joseph Collins, *The Doctor Looks at Literature: Psychological Studies of Life and Letters* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923), p. 170.

[34]"On *The Return of the Soldier* by Dame Rebecca West, D.B.E. With a Prefatory Note", *Yale University Gazette* v. 57, 1-2, (October 1982), p. 67. This contains a reprint of the letter West wrote to *The Observer* in response to a review of the play version which, in her opinion, unjustly involved itself in "the chatter against psycho-analysis" (p. 70).

[35]*The Daily News* May 3, 1917, p. 2. West's first reference to Freud appears in a letter to *The Freewoman* in 1912 (*YRB*, p. 62). By this time, Freud's *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sexuality* had been translated into English and published (1910). See L.S. Hearnshaw, "Psychology" in eds., C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, *The Twentieth Century Mind: History, Ideas and Literature in Britain 1: 1900-1918* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972).

cure for Chris will not necessarily make him happy, but merely ordinary is greeted with an appreciative response by the doctor:

> "I grant you that's all I do", he said. It queerly seemed as though he was experiencing the relief one feels on meeting an intellectual equal. "It's my profession to bring people from various outlying districts of the mind to the normal. There seems to be a general feeling it's the place where they ought to be. Sometimes I don't see the urgency myself" (*RS*, p. 168).

The irony here is that the war which Chris will have to confront again is hardly a normality. At the same time, his abnormality has exposed other abnormalities at the root of his society, showing normality to be a highly unstable term. Writing a review of a collection of stories on madness, West observed: "But there is something worse than hyperaesthesia; there is anaesthesia. It is a bad thing to be insane through too strong a consciousness of the horror of the world; but it is far, far worse to be so sane that you are unconscious of any horror at all. We ought to avoid this sanity which is buttressed up by brutish insensibility, in Art".[36] These are prophetic words for 1912. Chris's "insanity" in response to the brutality of war and the lies of his life and marriage is the sanest response of all. In his dependent, vulnerable "feminised" state, he is able to live out suppressed desires and speak hidden truths.

Women's Rooms

The novel opens in the nursery, a room whose emptiness is symbolic of a variety of personal and social inadequacies. Bereft of the child, but filled with spring sunlight, the room has been appropriated by Kitty to dry her hair, and Jenny recalls there her bad dreams about her cousin. Significantly, the narrative returns to this room at the end of the novel, where it becomes at once an emblem of loss and recovery. The memory of his dead son restores Chris to "normality". West's use of domestic imagery is important. As Maggie

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[36]"Shadows Out of the Crowd", *The Freewoman* July 18, 1912, p. 171.

Humm points out, "most consistently those images of houses and domesic interiors" belongs to "a possible 'feminine' linguistic practice".[37] This use of imagery she also adapted from Henry James and it is a practice Virginia Woolf developed as a metaphor of female power and identity in her own writing. The different rooms in the house, the different spaces the women occupy, the formality of the garden, the shabbiness of Margaret's parlour, all operate on literal and metaphorical levels. It is significant that Margaret and Chris's meetings take place outside the house, escaping its suffocating implications.

Jenny, sitting in the gloriously sunny room that was once the nursery, reports her nightmares which are based not on any real experience of the trenches, but on war films. Samuel Hynes suggests that: "The war film is obviously the faked scene in *Battle of the Somme*".[38] The dubious veracity of the film further illustrates the alienation between the real Front and the sunny rooms of Baldry Court. The house itself reflects the effects of war only in "the heavy blue blinds, which shroud the nine widows because a lost Zeppelin sometimes clanks like a skeleton across the sky above us" (*RS*, p. 55). West shows an even greater sense of alienation from the war through Margaret's complaints that "You can't get a girl nowadays that understands the baking" (*RS*, p. 94). Married to an invalid and living in respectable suburban poverty, Margaret's experience of the war is of a lack of domestic help, the point being that many women left domestic jobs for the munitions factories where they were better paid. By describing an apparently banal conversation, West subtly reveals some of the social and economic changes felt on the home front. But the relative stability of the home front is shattered by Chris's shell shock - the confused telegram and his return home bring the war into the lives of all three women, exposing Kitty's selfishness, Jenny's unrequited love and

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[37]Humm, p. 168.

[38]Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), p. 212.

Margaret's generosity. The return of the soldier creates the active intrusion of the war into the domestic space. Significantly, Chris returns to a house he does not recognise and his own room has been changed. He is displaced in every way, and his only recourse to identity is through the past. Jane Gledhill reads the novel as an explanation of how "the different experiences of being at the Front and staying at home need to be reconciled".[39] I would go further than this and say that the novel exposes the radical gap between the home front and the trenches, and this gap reveals the fissures within the home front too. And as West suggested in her journalism at this time, the war only revealed social problems that were already in existence. These fissures or social problems are made more evident in the novel in the context of the larger domestic space, the country house.

The Country House

> "[T]he white nymph drooped over the black waters of the bowl and reminded one how nice, how neat and nice, life used to be; the chintz sang the vulgar old English country-house song" (*RS*, pp. 152-153).

A number of critics have commented on the connections between West's first novel and the country house tradition. Certainly this theme was part of an ancient tradition in literature as well as a contemporary one, with the country house providing a central preoccupation for many Edwardian novelists, showing, as Jefferson Hunter says, "how heavily the imagination of the decade was invested in landed property".[40] West had examples in the pre-war novels of Galsworthy and E.M. Forster's proto-modernist *Howards End* (1910), Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), many of Henry James's novels and

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[39]Jane Gledhill, "Impersonality and Amnesia: A Response to World War 1 in the Writings of H.D. and Rebecca West", in *Women in World War I: The Written Response*, ed. Dorothy Goldman, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 182.

[40]*Edwardian Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.,: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 189.

short stories, and H.G. Wells's *Mr Britling Sees it Through* (1916). The country house was "a definition of England itself. Country houses were microcosms, islands within the island of England".[41] They were seen by realist writers as one way of exploring society[42], offering the possibility of dramatising the failure of a social order or of creating a vision of what might be recovered.[43] The country house was both an index of community and an emblem of isolation. During the war, it evoked nostalgia for what was past and became a symbol of change and fragmentation, no longer a place of safe retreat.[44] The sense of nostalgia is enhanced by the revival of the pastoral in English literary tradition, especially during the war, which created a renewed interest in this genre. Reasons for this are suggested by Paul Fussell: "Recourse to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them".[45]

Significantly, in his discussion of country houses in Edwardian fiction, Jefferson Hunter juxtaposes "woman-centred" novels and "house-centred novels", hinting at the confluence of two important Edwardian literary preoccupations.[46] Richard Gill points to the centrality of a female figure in many country house novels - - Mrs Wilcox and Mrs Ramsay to name two. They are "[v]ibrant, loving, maternal, possessing not knowledge but some deep wisdom, often strangely passive, sometimes mysterious, this woman seems to create for those around her, by her very existence, by her special quality of being, the occasion for community".[47] Thus, this tradition within which West chooses to set her novel is a male-dominated one, yet it also offers opportunities for reversing this domination. The attraction

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[41]Hunter, p. 190.
[42]See Peter Keating, p. 318-319.
[43]Richard Gill, *Happy Rural Seat*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 99.
[44]It is interesting to note that Virginia Woolf chose a country house setting for her pre- Second World War novel, *Between the Acts*. Later writers such as L.P. Hartley adopted similar foci for their depictions of war. See *The Go-Between* (London: Penguin, 1976), first published 1953.
[45]*The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 235.
[46]Hunter, p. 190.
[47]Gill, p. 13.

of this mode for West might have arisen from her own difficult circumstances, since it offered a form of escapism. But she also admired Ford Madox Ford's novel and she was writing in response to Wells's country house novel, *Mr Britling Sees it Through*. If *Return of the Soldier* is a novel prompted by Wells, it is also written in reaction to his novel. The way in which West chose to write her novel was in many ways a rewriting of the tradition, as a way of evoking the disruptive changes of the period and in opposition to the more optimistic endings of Wells and Forster.[48] My reading of West's rewriting will focus on the the house as a figure of change, a place of revelation and concealment, and as a new source of woman-centredness.

In one way, Baldry Court is the fifth character in the novel; it is certainly treated as such by Jenny, who perceives towards the end of the novel that "As usual the shining old panelling seemed aware of all that was going on and conscious that it was older and better than the people who owned it" (*RS*, p. 152). This attribution of consciousness to the house is made very early on in the novel when Jenny remembers the changes made to it after Chris's marriage to Kitty:

> You probably know the beauty of that view; for when Chris rebuilt Baldry Court after his marriage, he handed it over to architects who had not so much the wild eye of the artist as the knowing wink of the manicurist, and between them they massaged the dear old place into matter for innumerable photographs in the illustrated papers. (*RS*, p. 12)

The house is described as a grand old dame who has undergone the equivalent of plastic surgery. Through Jenny's descriptions of the house, West is able to offer a commentary on Kitty and Chris. Kitty, set up from the very beginning of the novel as the perfected "parasitic woman", the ultimate version of "the world's worst failure", bears a striking resemblance to the newly renovated house. Kitty looks "so like a girl on a magazine cover that one expected

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[48]This point is open to debate. The ending of *Howards End* has been seen as both optimistic and pessimistic depending on the perspective taken.

to find a large '7d.' somewhere attached to her person" (*RS*, p. 11). Like the house, she is described as a commodity on show, for consumption by the popular press. The extreme refinement of Baldry Court is a reflection of Kitty's cultivated beauty, a cultivation of neat edges and shining surfaces, leaving no room for depth. Jenny makes this point in describing the gardens: "There is no aesthetic reason for that border; the common outside looks lovelier where it fringes the road with dark gorse and rough amber grasses. Its use is purely philosophic; it proclaims that here we estimate only controlled beauty, that the wild will not have its way within our gates, that it must be made delicate and decorated into felicity" (*RS*, p. 115). This means that there is no allowance for shell-shocked soldiers in this house, nor women like Margaret. In its perfectly manicured state, Baldry Court could be seen as an attempt to deny the war, to deny change and to deny truth.

The depiction of Chris in terms of Jenny's descriptions of the house is more subtle. The picture of Chris that emerges is not as idealistic as the one Jenny consciously paints throughout the novel. His careless handing over of the house to architects with inclinations towards commerce rather than art, and the suggestion that the house is better than all its owners produces a more negative impression. Although West does not develop the point, it is made very clear that the beauty and fineness of Baldry Court arise out of economic exploitation. Jenny recalls the past when Chris "started for Mexico, to keep the mines going through the revolution, to keep the firm's head above water and Baldry Court sleek and hospitable, to keep everything bright and splendid save only his youth, which after that was dulled by care" (*RS*, p. 110). Chris's cruel treatment of Margaret all those years ago, perceived by Margaret as pure class consciousness ("he wasn't trusting me as he would trust a girl of his own class", *RS*, p. 107), is an extension of such attitudes. In the same way, the sacrifice of Chris's youth to the maintenance of the family business can be paralleled with

his part in the war. One male activity is replaced by another. One has aged Chris; the other will probably destroy him. In the light of this, George Parfitt is right to suggest that Chris's amnesiac rejection of Kitty and yearning for Margaret is due to his identification of the war with the English patrician class. In the end, "West's novel suggests that the kind of England represented by Wells's Matching's Easy [in *Mr Britling Sees it Through*] and, earlier, by Forster's Howards End has responsibility for the war and, having allowed the war, can only destroy its own".[49] Thus, concealed in the portrayal of Baldry Court in all its splendour lie painful truths about Kitty and about Chris, truths of which Jenny is never fully conscious.

But Jenny's awareness is enhanced through the medium of the house in other ways. Margaret's response to the house when she first sees it is not awe but pity. "No-one had ever before pitied Chris for the magnificence of Baldry Court. It had been our pretence that by wearing costly clothes and organizing a costly life we had been the servants of his desire. But she revealed the truth that although he did indeed desire a magnificent house, it was a house not built with hands" (*RS.* p. 116). The magnificence is shown to be hollow, built on materialist values and around false assumptions. The splendid house is merely a façade for an emptiness at its core. This emptiness is not only representative of Chris and Kitty's marriage, but of the state of England.[50] The house acts as an index of change in another way, too. The painful discoveries the amnesiac Chris makes about the changes in his house act as a metaphor for the radical changes England was undergoing. Chris's inability to recognise his own home also symbolises the alienation of the men who went to war, from themselves and from the people they left. Chris's injury not only introduces the disruptive Margaret into the house, it also defamiliarizes the house, thus stripping it of the façade so elaborately

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[49]George Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), pp. 92-93.

[50]See Jane Eldridge Miller's discussion of "the juncture between the Edwardian marriage problem novel and modernist fiction" (*Rebel Women*, p. 83).

maintained by Kitty and Jenny. Chris's painful sense that "This house is different" (*RS*, p. 54) is spread among its occupants. Jenny feels that: "Strangeness had come into the house and everything was appalled by it, even time" (*RS*, p. 55). Interestingly, Chris discovers that during the renovations , his own room has been replaced by one for Kitty. "He looked up the staircase and would have gone up had I not held him back. For the little room in the south wing with the fishing-rods and the old books went in the rebuilding, absorbed by the black and white magnificence that is Kitty's bedroom" (*RS*, p. 52). Male space is replaced by a woman's room, suggesting a form of female empowerment. The house becomes a location in which to read the forces of social disintegration and reorganisation.

The replacement of male space by female space suggests another area of the country-house novel which West re-interprets. The patriarchal country house becomes the woman-centred country house in which Kitty and Jenny preside. E.M. Forster anticipates this shift from patriarchy to a matriarchy (temporary as it was) in the ending of *Howards End*, where the two sisters, Helen and Margaret Schlegel, dominate the closing scene. The status of the presiding women at the end of *Return of the Soldier* is, however, ambiguous. Margaret, Jenny and Kitty are, in different ways, victims of a society that has classified people by social and marital status and by gender. Their socialisation has taught them to depend on the man they can no longer rely on. Kitty and Jenny derive their identities from their dependence on Chris; his absence means a loss of selfhood. Margaret is abandoned twice. At the same time, the women survive while, it is hinted, Chris will perish. Jenny and Kitty will not only have rooms of their own, but an estate of their own. Margaret's position is less secure because of her class. But while Margaret does not have economic power, she has the power to restore Chris to sanity, and ironically, to restore him to or save him from the trenches. As Judith Meyer points out, hers is "an act of self-sacrifice which is actually an act of supreme

power".[51] The three women desire Chris's return to "sanity" for different reasons, and he is at the mercy of their desire. Kitty seeks his restoration from purely selfish motives, but Margaret and Jenny decide on the necessity through their own moral evaluations of life. Jenny justifies the rightness of the cure because without it "He would not be quite a man" (*RS*, p. 183). At this point, Jenny and Margaret become "arbiters of manhood"[52] through a bizarre inversion of the convention according to which men normally dictate definitions of womanhood. The nurturing role of Margaret becomes, paradoxically, a destructive one: "Rebecca West not only dramatizes the healing effects of female power, but also the irony of translating that power into action in the real world to match the destructive ends of war".[53]

Margaret has other disruptive effects. She can be compared to the mystical woman who creates a sense of community and a sense of well-being described by Richard Gill, but with a number of differences. Unlike Mrs Wilcox or Mrs Ramsay, or even Mrs Moore (*A Passage to India*), Margaret is neither beautiful nor relatively wealthy. As an outsider by class, Margaret embodies a variety of values lost by the acquisitive "parasitic woman" of the middle classes. She first of all acts as a disintegrating force before becoming a restorative and uniting presence. Her appearance at Baldry Court refutes its refinement and gradually reveals its falseness. Shocking in her appearance, "repulsively furred with neglect and poverty" (*RS*, p. 25), Margaret at first represents for Jenny "a spreading stain on the fabric of our life" (*RS*, p. 37). The spreading stain is knowledge, knowledge not only of the realities of war through Chris's injuries, but also the realities of society, the encroaching "red suburban stain" (*RS*, p. 22). The red rust of suburbia is clearly reminiscent of a similar description in E.M. Forster's *Howards End*, which in many ways can be seen as a parent text

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[51]Meyer, p. 142.
[52]Meyer, p. 142.
[53]Meyer, p. 143. Similar observations have been made about Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, where Clarissa can be seen to derive power and vision partly through the revelation induced by Septimus's death.

to West's, but one that has been outgrown. Forster's views of encroaching suburbia and all it entailed are deeply ambivalent. His ambivalence is embodied most vividly in the figures of Leonard Bast and his wife. Leonard and Jacky bear traces of the abyss, "a faint smell, a goblin footfall, telling of a life where love and hatred had both decayed",[54] and while Leonard's aspirations are endorsed and preserved by his fathering a child, he is conveniently removed. Margaret Grey could be seen as a rewriting of Jacky Bast, whose humiliation at the hands of Henry Wilcox is re-enacted by Chris Baldry and then redeemed by an unguarded memory. Margaret does not carry odours of the abyss, but instead the chill air of truth, accompanied by both healing and pain.[55] Sharon Ouditt adds another aspect to West's reconsideration of class stereotyping:

> The values that Margaret embodies, then, are seen to override even the culturally determining limits of language. This lower-middle-class woman, closer to nature, to suffering and to human passion than her social superiors, is a matrix for a register of understanding that is far wiser than the ruling classes. This reverses the trend in contemporary ideology that assumes upper-class custody of refined sensitivity and rational thinking".[56]

Claire Tylee's description of the closing pages of the novel as a "pat ending" is reductive.[57] Kitty's satisfaction at the return of her husband's memory is not the only possible response, either to the event or to the novel as a whole. The consequences of Chris's cure are different for each character. The one consequence which unites them all is loss. Chris and Margaret lose the temporary restoration of an idyllic past, Margaret loses Chris again, Jenny and Kitty are left alone once more, and Chris loses them all. A brief comparison with the earlier "country house" novels that influenced West in writing her own, reveals her more realistic assessment of the consequences of drastic change, not only for men and

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[54]*Howards End*, p. 122.

[55]Virginia Woolf's portrayal of the restorative powers of the cleaning women, Mrs Bast and Mrs MacNab in *To the Lighthouse,* offers a useful comparison with both Forster and West.

[56]Ouditt, p. 115.

[57]Tylee, p. 142.

women individually, but for the relationship between men and women as well. While Forster's *Howards End* (1910) precedes the war, it provides a useful comparison with West's novel in its treatment of the country house and the values that supposedly reside there. Although the fragmentation against which the desire to "only connect" is pitted is ever present, a sense of tenuous connection and tenuous hope is conveyed by the end of the novel. And despite the failure of Helen and Leonard Bast's union, a union between different classes, their child survives as a symbol of hope and possibility. The final vision is a pastoral one where "it'll be such a crop of hay as never!",[58] signifying hope for the future. In *The Return of the Soldier*, the three women survive but there is no child, nor any ideal vision of the future. The deaths of Margaret's son and Chris's son symbolise a failure at the root of their relationships, and thus of their society. Not only has there been a failure to transcend class barriers, but Chris and Kitty have failed to perpetuate themselves, implying the collapse of a social system and the impossibility of its regeneration. The ending can be seen to operate metaphorically, suggesting that the deaths of so many sons in the war is the responsibility of their parents - and of the society which created them. The novel ends not with the joyous vision of a golden harvest, but with Jenny's sense of foreboding that: "When we had lifted the yoke of our embraces from his shoulders he would go back to that flooded trench in Flanders under that sky more full of flying death than clouds, to that No Man's Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead..." (*RS*, p. 187).

The starkness of the conclusion to West's novel is further highlighted when it is compared with H.G. Wells's war novel, *Mr Britling Sees it Through*. Both of these novels, written during the difficult yet at times happy years together, employ witty and telling references to one another. Wells included a character called Cissie Corner whose sister's

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[58] *Howards End*, p. 332.

name is Lettie (the name of West's sister). Lettie's husband is lost in the war and may be an amnesiac. Cissie, the real name of Rebecca West, is an evocation and celebration of the young Rebecca West.[59] As if in response to this fictional representation (Wells had already portrayed West in *The Research Magnificent*), West gives Wells's physical attributes to the doctor who finally cures Chris, Dr Gilbert Anderson. The idyll of Monkey Island remembered so vividly by both Chris and Margaret is drawn from her own experience. As Victoria Glendinning says, "the Monkey Island setting of the soldier's early love affair gave Rebecca the opportunity of describing, with lyric precision the place where she and Wells were most happy". [60] But whilst these two writers and lovers include each other playfully in their texts, the novels themselves move in different directions. While both are set around a country house, Dower House in Matching's Easy and Baldry Court near Harrow-weald, Mr Britling presides throughout over Dower House and, despite the pain and anguish caused by the war, he eventually "sees it through". Chris Baldry never presides; he is a stranger in his own home, and a stranger to himself. He functions as an aporia in the novel, rather than a real character. Although Mr Britling loses his son in the war and suffers deeply, he is able to write out his anguish and find solutions. He undergoes a religious experience; composing a long, cathartic letter to the parents of the dead German tutor and finally creating a vision of hope. The ending of the novel is strikingly similar to that of *Howards End*: "Wave after wave of warmth and light came sweeping before the sunrise across the world of Matching's Easy. It was as if there was nothing but morning and sunrise in the world. From away towards the church came the sound of some early worker whetting a scythe".[61] The warmth and light, the vision of harvest, all presage hope for a better world. Chris Baldry cannot solve

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[59]See J.R.Hammond for a more detailed comparison.

[60]Glendinning, p. 62. See Gordon Ray, Victoria Glendinning, J.R. Hammond and Carl Rollyson for more details.

[61]*Mr Britling Sees it Through*, p. 433.

his problems so easily; in fact the only way he can solve them is by forgetting . His story is told and interpreted by Jenny his cousin, and the only real sense of articulateness derives from his recall of the past. His amnesiac experience of the present is dislocated and bewildering. Unlike the eloquent thinker and writer that Mr Britling is, Chris's only response to the restoration of his memory and subsequent revelation of the truth is "to wear a dreadful decent smile" (*RS*, p. 187) and return to the front.[62] By presenting a male character whose centrality and masculinity is reduced by psychic injury, and whose response to reality is inarticulateness and stoicism, West creates a gloomier and perhaps a more realistic picture. Chris's inability to solve the problems he has helped to create is a more probing and revealing portrait of the times. James Longenbach, comparing West's novel with Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy, *Parade's End* (1924), draws a similar conclusion:

> When Baldry is cured of his memory lapse, he must return to a woman he does not love, a life he does not value - and a war that has not yet ended. Ford's protagonist is reborn into a new life; West's is reborn into the life he has always known, and there is no sense that one age has ended and a new age begun. Neither the Great War nor the war between women and men comes to an easy conclusion in *The Return of the Soldier*.[63]

The novel which West owes most to in her depiction of the soldier is, of course, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). Although his novel has a pre-war setting, concentrating on the inhabitants of the society of country houses and the *nouveau riche*, it anticipates the breakdown of that society, to be precipitated by the war. Edward Ashburnham's painful parting from the girl he loves is marked by extreme self-control, stoicism and then suicide. John Dowell, the narrator describes the scene: "He swung round

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[62]Significantly, West does not describe the scene of revelation between Margaret and Chris. They are out of sight and Jenny, who watches and narrates throughout the novel, refuses to watch on this occasion. In omitting this moment, West is putting into practice a technique she notes and admires in Henry James's writing: "Certainly he invented a technical trick which in its way was as important as the discovery which Ibsen was making about the same time and which he himself used later in his last masterpiece, that if one had a really "great" scene one ought to leave it out and describe it simply by the full relation of its consequences" (*HJ*, pp. 95-96).

[63]Longenbach, p. 118.

on his heel and, large, slouching, and walking with a heavy deliberate pace, he went out of the station. I followed him and got up beside him in the high dog-cart. It was the most horrible performance I have ever seen".[64] What West does in her novel is to lift the mask of the actor and analyse the consequences of the performance. In his amnesiac state, Chris refuses to play the role he has always played, while his restored memory returns him to an old and unhappy part.

In *The Good Soldier* and *The Return of the Soldier*, Mr Britling is seen through. West interrogates the optimism of Wells's novel and its method of character-presentation, drastically altering its accumulation of detail. In relation to the writing of Wells, the "Edwardian", and Ford Madox Ford, the "Georgian", Rebecca West's fiction can be seen as transformation in progress. She rewrites and condenses the Edwardian novel, replacing the male-centredness of Ford Madox Ford's narration with a female perspective. Although obviously indebted to Ford and especially Henry James in *The Return of the Soldier*, West had neither perfected their techniques nor made them completely her own. Her next novel, *The Judge*, reveals an impatience with the narrative form employed in the earlier novel, and a break with her "modernist" and "Edwardian" uncles. Set before the war, *The Judge* reflects some of the radical changes brought by the war years; changes in West's personal circumstances, her perception of transitions within the feminist movement and important shifts in her aesthetic ideals.

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[64]Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, (London: The Bodly Head, 1971), p. 215.

Chapter Six

Transitions: "The World's Worst Failure" and Other Narratives

War and Post War: Changing Feminisms

West's preoccupation with change in her fiction and journalism written during the war years is typical of the time and a distinctive feature of her work throughout her career. Alert to the impact of the war on feminist demands, West tried to capture and make sense of the changes she saw happening; for example, the disarray of the different feminist movements over their responses to the war. The WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) had abandoned the suffrage cause altogether in the name of patriotism, while the NUWSS (The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) was torn between pacifism and patriotism. Feminist aims became fragmented, as women were at once encouraged by the opportunities opening up to them during the war and distracted by the anti-feminist backlash and strengthening cult of motherhood. This fragmentation and the reversion to conventional views of womanhood of certain feminist groups, continued after the end of the war, further complicating feminist aims.[1]

The end of war did have positive consequences for feminism, the most immediate and significant being the Act of 1918 which granted a limited franchise to women over thirty. This partial achievement of what pre-war feminists had been campaigning for, the vote, offered encouragement for further feminist demands, but it also brought about a loss of

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[1]What happened to the different women's movements during and after the war remains the subject of much heated debate, articulated most clearly in Jane Marcus's attack in her article "The Asylums of Antaeus, Women, War and Madness; Is there a Female Fetishism?" (in *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*. eds., E. Meese and Alice Parker, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1988) on Susan Gilbert's "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War" (*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 8, 1982, pp. 422-450). Here Marcus quarrels with Gilbert over her assertion that women were empowered sexually, economically and personally during the war. How can this be, Marcus asks, when so many women lost their jobs after the war and were forced back into domesticity?

momentum and further fragmentation amongst the various feminist groups. Indeed, most historians of the post-war period and of feminism have commented in detail on what Susan Kingsley Kent has called "the demise of British Feminism". This resulted from a variety of factors, in particular, the re-emergence of the doctrine of separate spheres, a doctrine supported by the New Feminists, by current scientific discourses and by a postwar backlash against the opportunities women had seized during the war. As Susan Kingsley Kent notes:

> With the onset of the Great War, many feminists began to modify their understandings of masculinity and femininity. Their insistence on equality with men and the acknowledgement of the model of sex war that accompanied that demand, gradually gave way to an ideology that emphasised women's special sphere - a separate sphere, in fact - and carried with it an urgent belief in the relationship between the sexes as one of complementarity.[2]

The New Feminists, led by Eleanor Rathbone, emphasised sexual difference, in particular, in relation to women's special roles: "feminists should seek reforms related to women's special concerns, especially those involving motherhood, rather than seeking what men had. Family allowances paid to the mother, for example, were more important than equal pay for women".[3] While the Equality Feminists shared some of the ideals of the New Feminists, they were fundamentally opposed to the acceptance of divisions perpetuated by an emphasis on sexual difference: "Equality feminists warned that new feminists placed a 'dangerous insistence on women's natures', which encouraged traditional notions of femaleness, thereby making it harder for women to escape from traditional roles".[4]

Rebecca West's engagement with and contribution to these post-war feminist discourses reflect the complexities and difficulties of taking a feminist position during the

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[2]Susan Kingsley Kent's, "The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the Demise of British Feminism", *Journal of British Studies*, 27.3 (1988), p. 234. For other detailed accounts of this period, see: "Gender Reconstruction After the First World War" in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Harold L. Smith, (UK: Edward Elgar, 1990) and also criticism by Olive Banks, Johanna Alberti, Jane Lewis, David Doughan, David Pugh and Brian Harrison.

[3]Harold Smith, "British Feminism in the 1920s" in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, p. 48.

[4]Smith, "British Feminism in the 1920s", p. 48.

twenties, as Loretta Stec has observed: "The contradictions that we find in West's writing of the mid-1920s are in some sense the debates of contemporary British feminist politics writ small".[5] West's earliest response to the partial franchise for women was an expression of relief that the battle for equality was over: "Now that the State has admitted that women are citizens, we are relieved of the tiresome necessity of proving that we exist".[6] This sense of relief at a battle well won was, however, only temporary for feminists, especially for West, whose declaration in 1924 that: "I am an old-fashioned feminist. I believe in the sex-war",[7] more accurately represents her feminist allegiances. These lay with the Equality feminists, specifically, with the Six Point Group established by Lady Rhondda in 1921 which, "Although non-militant, ... viewed itself as a descendant of the WSPU".[8] As various historians have pointed out, its emphasis on equality, for example, on equal pay for women teachers, was accompanied by demands for legislation on issues similar to those voiced by the New Feminists, involving special protection for women. For the Six Point Group, this need for new legislation extended from widowed mothers, to single mothers and abused children. Lady Rhondda's feminist weekly, *Time and Tide*, established in 1920, provided a platform from which feminist writers such as Rebecca West, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain could air their views.

The attention given to the status of mothers and motherhood by the Six Point Group overlapped with the even greater emphasis placed on motherhood by the New Feminists. As Harold Smith points out: "Most of the legislation enhanced the status of mothers, thus encouraging women to view motherhood as a woman's primary function, rather than

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[5]Stec, p. 70.
[6]"Women as Brainworkers", p. 57.
[7]"On a Form of Nagging", *Time and Tide* 31, October. This essay can be found in Dale Spender's *Time and Tide Wait for No Man*, (London; Pandora, 1989), pp. 58-63.
[8]Smith, "British Feminism in the 1920s", p. 50.

facilitating new roles".[9] Through her own concern with the issues of motherhood, during and after the war years, West both participated in and interrogated this preoccupation of post-war feminism. In "Women as Brainworkers", West draws on the metaphor of mothercare to represent what post-war feminists desired: "a love of life that will let no child starve, no sick person suffer for lack of any help that human hands can bring, no old man die except in ease, and that will fight for conditions which make health and serenity the common lot, with the same obstinate fervour with which the protection of privilege and the rights of capitalism are fought for to-day".[10] This slide into an ideological discourse of motherhood, evident in the writings of post-war feminists across the different spectra, was accompanied by an interest in new and apparently liberating discourses on female sexuality, appearing at that time in the literature of both psychology and sexology. The popularisation of Freudian theory made way for a new acceptance of the notion of female sexuality, propagated in the writings of sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and marketed by writers such as Marie Stopes, who "did much to popularise the idealisation of woman as mother: she also gave widespread publicity to changes in attitude towards women's sexuality".[11] This conjunction of more liberal views on sexuality with an ideology of motherhood was in danger of reinforcing prejudices based on sexual difference and further entrenching Freud's view that "biology was destiny".[12] Susan Kingsley Kent points out that:

> "In embracing radically new - and seemingly liberating - views of women as human beings with sexual identities, many feminists ironically accepted theories of sexual difference that helped to advance notions of separate spheres for men and women. By the end of the 1920s, new feminists found themselves in a conceptual bind that trapped women in 'traditional' domestic and maternal roles, and limited their ability to advocate equality and justice

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[9]Smith, "British Feminism in the 1920s", p. 52.
[10]"Women as Brainworkers", p. 58.
[11]Johanna Alberti, p. 101.
[12] See Jane Lewis, Johanna Alberti and Susan Kingsley Kent for discussions of this aspect of postwar feminism.

for women".[13]

Registering Change: "The World's Worst Failure"

In the light of these shifts within differing feminist movements during and after the war, West's 1916 "World's Worst Failure" series takes on a significance that goes well beyond its specific war context (see Chapter 4). The series represents West's attempt to define feminism, using the metaphor of femininity or elegance, during a period of radical change and uncertainty. As Sue Thomas suggests, the series provides: "West's first extended summation of her feminist ideas".[14] As an example of early twentieth-century feminist writing, it creates a vivid picture of the complex web of ideas about women current at the time - the problematic concept of "femininity" itself (cultivated or biological), the roles created for and by women in society, and the symbolic function of adornment within the systems of "masculinity" and "femininity". West's feminist treatise anticipates later feminist thinking, from Simone de Beauvoir's sense of femininity as a form of bondage[15] to the more recent preoccupation with the male gaze, Foucaltian self-surveillance and Lacanian womanliness as masquerade which conceals absence. Such themes are not only anticipated by West's theories of feminism and femininity, but they can also be seen as nascent in her early fictional writings and certain articles written for the *Freewoman*.[16] West's analysis was not merely retrospective. In summing up her ideas, she also tried to reassess and redefine a feminist future, particularly through her discussion in "The Schoolmistress" and "Scarlet Berries", of ways in which femininity is cultivated. Most interesting, however, in the context of transition, is West's self-conscious analysis in the first article, of her own complicity with

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[13]Kingsley Kent, "Gender Reconstruction", p. 66.

[14]"Rebecca West's Second Thoughts on Feminism", *Genders*, (No. 13, Spring 1992), p. 91. This article is the only piece published on West to offer any serious analysis of the "World's Worst Failure" series.

[15]"Elegance is also a bondage". Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), trans. H.M. Parshley, (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 548.

[16]See "Nana", "Trees of Gold", "The Sentinel", "*Adela*" and "Indissoluble Matrimony".

the elegance system, and the consequences of this for her feminist and literary identity. I will now consider briefly West's constructionist/essentialist debate and her treatment of the relations between feminism, femininity and professionalism as unresolved issues, which resurface not only in *The Judge*, but throughout her writing in the next decade.

Constructing Femininity

The consideration of the ways in which femininity is "created", through West's analysis of working women ("The Woman in Industry") and prostitution ("The Woman Without Fortitude") (see Chapter 4), is extended and examined from a different angle in the second article in the series, "The Schoolmistress" (January 22, 1916). Here West explores the ways in which women *become* feminine through an education system which diminishes and denies their potential. Drawing on her own experience of secondary school in Edinburgh, West attacks the women who maintain the present system of women's education through "a fundamental wrongness of attitude to their own womanhood".[17] West's criticism focuses on a young mathematics teacher and a headmistress, both with a failed potential, having renounced for the sake of femininity, "the gift of personal vividness".[18] This ethic of renunciation is then transmitted to the students, thus perpetuating a cycle of repression and self-repression. These teachers, versions of Virginia Woolf's "Angel in the House", are responsible for maintaining the survival of their species.[19] With a characteristic flourish, West captures her whole argument in the last few lines, revealing femininity as a *construct* of male desire and as a self-perpetuating system:

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[17]"The Schoolmistress", *New Republic*, p. 300.

[18]"The Schoolmistress", *New Republic*, p. 301. Significantly, West criticises Oxford for "breeding women to this conformity" (p. 301), anticipating Woolf's much more detailed attack on Oxbridge in *A Room of One's Own*.

[19]See "Professions for Women", *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966).

> "You are not free women, for all your economic independence; you are still slaves to men's desire. You weary and starve your pupils with your deliberate vacuity, because men like unmarried women to be blank pages on which they may write what they will. You too live on the favor of men. You too are given up body and soul to the instinct for elegance".[20]

West sees the education system for women as one which contributes to the belief that women should be moulded into objects which simply reflect the male ego. West describes a former teacher as "designed worthlessness", made in the idealised image of the Virgin Mary. Breaking into angry speech, the narrator declares:

> "Of course, that is your ideal: but surely you see that that is not the Virgin chosen by God to mother the Son of Man, but the virgin who is foolishly desired by men? This is not the woman who bore her child in a manger, who lifted him to the adoration of the kings, who saved him by the flight into Egypt. This is the creation of that lust in the hearts of the baser sort of men which is a perverted form of fatherhood".[21]

Portraits of the Virgin Mary painted by men are some of the many mirrors into which women have been taught to gaze and thus model themselves on the images of male desire. West sees women's education at this time as directly involved in reducing women to this sole function.

In contrast with her arguments about the way in which capitalism and exploitation ("The Woman in Industry" and "The Woman Without Fortitude"), as well as inferior and biased education practices both create and perpetuate the elegance system, West considers an alternative view of femininity in her final article, "Scarlet Berries". Here she shifts the argument away from the constructionist debate over the cultivation of femininity, towards a consideration of the feminine in biological and evolutionary terms. West's attempt to provide a more scientific explanation of the differences between the sexes and the cultivation of "femininity", is continuous with her engagement with scientific discourses in her early journalism (See Chapter 2). Various arguments developed from Darwinian evolution

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[20]"The Schoolmistress", *New Republic*, p. 302.
[21]"The Schoolmistress", *New Republic*, p. 302.

continued to proliferate during this time, particularly in anti-feminist discourses. The debates on the "Woman Question" remained saturated with scientific and pseudo-scientific discourse. Like Olive Schreiner in *Woman and Labour* (the text to which West is most obviously indebted in writing this series), West tries to integrate scientific thought and a feminist perspective.

In "Scarlet Berries", West represents gender relations within an evolutionary framework by telling the tale of the cave woman who "twine[d] scarlet berries in her hair as she sat by the fire and waited for her mate".[22] Like Schreiner and other feminists, West used an evolutionary narrative as a way of "enacting a negotiation with the prevailing intellectual vocabulary of the time", seeking "to demonstrate not only the desirability but also the inevitability of women's emancipation".[23] The cave woman in West's tale is depicted as dreaming of freedom and equality once the external dangers of the night are destroyed, that is, once humankind has evolved enough to control the environment, thus allowing for a different relationship between men and women.

> "When all the wolves are dead" she used to think, "how good life will become! My man and I will walk where we will in the forest, and we will be great friends, and very tender and wise with each other"...Well, all the wolves are dead. But women do not yet walk freely with men in the forest. Most men bid them not gad about looking for wisdom and tenderness but stay by the camp-fire twining scarlet berries in their hair; and most women obey. And children will die from famine and sickness, for the world seeks more busily for more scarlet berries than for food and healing herbs. But, bitterest of all to the dead cave woman, though the world has concentrated so extravagantly upon the adornments she invented, it has forgotten the meaning that set her whole body glowing as her fingers twined them in her hair. Those berries were the badge of courage of the heart and of the body; they were an invitation to love and motherhood. These things have had no deadlier foe than elegance.[24]

West attributes the failure of this dream firstly to a failure in evolution. Significantly, she

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[22]"Scarlet Berries", *New Republic*, p.126.
[23]Felski, p. 155.
[24]"Scarlet Berries", *New Republic*, p.126.

alters the often misogynist bias in evolutionary theory and its reception. As Lyn Pykett points out: "Both Spencerian and Darwinian theory placed women lower on the evolutionary scale than men. For Spencer, woman was undeveloped man; for Darwin, man was developed woman".[25] What West suggests instead is that the evolutionary process of the relationship between men and women has failed, that what may have been practical (in West's opinion) for the early survival of the species no longer has a function. While society may have altered to accommodate the many advances of mankind, it has not done so in relation to men and women. The relationship between the protector and the protected has become an excuse for exploitation and oppression.

The tale of the cave woman carries the allegorical and mythical overtones of Schreiner's *Women and Labour*. At the end of her text, Schreiner envisages "a utopian future, a new paradise to which women of the present will lead future generations".[26]

> The ancient Chaldean seer had a vision of a Garden of Eden which lay in a remote past ... We also have our dream of a Garden: but it lies in a distant future. We dream that women shall eat of the tree of knowledge together with man and ... they shall together raise about them an Eden nobler than any the Chaldean dreamed of; an Eden created by their own labour and made beautiful by their own fellowship.[27]

The cave woman's dream is strikingly similar to Schreiner's utopian vision. The biblical language Schreiner uses in her vision is not overtly present in West's text, but her evolutionary fable has mythical overtones which imply that the failure of the cave woman's dream is a version of the Fall, not from innocence, but from a relationship of equality between women and men. In addition to this, the daughters of the cave woman/Eve are seen to be complicit in that fall.

West invents a tale of original adornment in order to accommodate scientific theories

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[25]Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine*, p. 155.
[26]Felski, p. 158.
[27]Schreiner, p. 282.

about women, contemporary feminist theories and her own interpretation. The primal meaning of the scarlet berries of the cave woman has been perverted by the cult of femininity. This primal meaning is problematic and seems to trigger a series of contradictions nascent in West's five articles. West associates the scarlet berries with love and motherhood, and at the end of the piece, the feminist future she envisages is not "a wrenching away to personal freedom from the immemorial duties of women". Instead, these duties will be "an added strength of function, another sinew that shall make the arm of humanity, as it brings down the hammer of its will on the world, mould it more beautifully than it had ever dared to think" (p. 127). The problem that arises here is how to align West's constructionist argument about the way in which women are "created" in "The Schoolmistress" and "The Woman Without Fortitude", with her essentialist assertion that motherhood is an "immemorial duty". This clash is emblematic of the difficulties that existed at the heart of the differing women's movements, highlighting the unresolved tensions between the biological and social definitions of women. West uses the ideology of motherhood to distinguish between what she perceived to be an essential part of womanhood (perhaps with Schreiner as a model), and "femininity" which is defined as "unnatural".[28] West returns to these issues in writing *The Judge*, weaving evolutionary discourse into other discourses as part of her reassessment of the cult of motherhood.

Fashion, Femininity and Feminist Identity

In all the articles in the series, West attacks the cultivation of femininity, through the

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[28]Like Schreiner and other feminist writers, West also draws on eugenic discourses popular at the time. As Felski points out: "Feminists frequently resorted to eugenic theories to insist that women's presence in education, the workplace, and the public realm would lead not to depletion of the race, as conservatives feared, but rather to a population of healthier and more vigorous bodies" (Felski, *Gender of Modernity*, p. 155). West's reading of Olive Schreiner and her attitude towards eugenic arguments is another area for further study.

metaphor of fashion, for creating a community of false consciousness among women, where ritual adornment merely perpetuates the predominance of male desire and female submission to this desire. At the same time, West's attack is double edged, for her analysis of femininity exposes ambiguities not only within the fashion system, but also within the very definitions of femininity and feminism. But it is in the first article that West writes herself into the text, exploring her own position in relation to her analysis. In "The World's Worst Failure", the narrator finds herself in the company of a beautiful, fragile Frenchwoman and "a sallow girl from Chicago", both of whom enact the need to strike "a feminine note" (p. 582).[29] The ultimate irony of the piece is the glimpse the narrator/West catches of all three women in the mirror, which suddenly reveals them all as complicit in the elegance system. Through the portrayal of the Frenchwoman, the girl from Chicago and the narrator, West investigates the associations of art and artifice with women, femininity as a construct and as masquerade, and the disjunction between the feminine or frivolous and notions of masculinity, professionalism and high art.

The central theme and metaphor of the first article ("The World's Worst Failure") is the mirror, "the fundamental paradigm of female definition in Western Culture".[30] West weaves a complex narrative around the group of three women who watch each other and gaze at themselves in the multiple mirrors of a hotel drawing-room in Maidenhead. This process of looking within the narrative renders the article itself a strange mirror for the narrator and for the reader. The setting of the narrative, three rooms in a hotel, suggests a glamorised version of the domestic sphere. A sense of introspection and claustrophobia is enhanced by the presence of mirrors in each room - the wall of mirrors in the dining-room, "the twilight

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[29]Page references to quotations are from *The Gender of Modernism* anthology.

[30]Jennijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 26.

of many mirrors" (p. 581) in the bedroom and the cheval mirror in the drawing-room. The different mirrors offer a variety of perspectives on West's central themes. The wall of mirrors in the dining-room "make[s] tunnels of light", creating a similar effect to that of the eighteenth-century rococo mirrors which "reduced the living people themselves moving about in the room to the state of decorative figures".[31] This decorative status is imposed and induced, according to West, by the fashion system and the sex system itself. Through her meeting with the Frenchwoman, West discovers that the system of the *chic* and the sex system are intimately related: "One saw, as she rolled up and down the room in imitation of a stout Russian princess under the influence of passion, that a very jolly human grotesque had been wasted when she became a part of what was, it appeared before I left the room, an even more ancient and relentless system than the *chic*" (p. 582). Thus, the mirrors in the text operate on both a literal and metaphorical level, reflecting the women's faces and their concentration on being feminine as well as reflecting ways in which women are constructed and construct themselves into the feminine.

The mirror image is a visual image which must be looked into and considered. The centrality of the gaze and of the visual has become an essential consideration in much recent feminist criticism.[32] The tradition of the gaze as a masculine practice has additional consequences:

> Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.[33]

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[31]Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 403.

[32]Pollock points out that to privilege the visual over every other sense is an impoverishment of bodily relations: "The moment the look dominates, the body loses materiality". Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 50.

[33]John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 47.

West makes a similar point. There are no male characters in this text, only the three women, and yet the male gaze is omnipresent. Ironically of course, the origin of male desire is reduced to mere photographs of the Frenchwoman's dead husband and her bankrupt lover, emblematic not only of 'masculine' disempowerment during the war, but also of the absurdity of women who continue to mould themselves in a discredited image. Despite the actual absence of men in the text, the women assess themselves and each other through the eyes of men. The Frenchwoman is an image of beautiful boredom, piqued because there is no-one to appreciate her. Her pleasure in existence depends entirely on being an object of vision. As the narrator notes: "One perceived in her discomfort that there must be many sorts of pain of which no cognisance is taken in this world: the anguish of the chair on which nobody sits, the wine that is not drunk, the woman bred to please when there is no one at hand to be pleased" (p. 581). The perception is highly ironical. Comparing the woman to unsipped wine or a neglected chair highlights her status as an object, inanimate, passive, a veritable mannequin.

The mirror in "The World's Worst Failure" reflects the pure femininity of the Frenchwoman, the text investigates the components of that femininity. Patricia Waugh is one of many feminist critics to highlight the notion of "self-surveillance" (drawn from Michel Foucault's work) in relation to the repression of the female body. As she says: "the acceptable 'feminine' forms of ... behaviour are highly regulated. Medicine, psychology, fashion, welfare guidelines (rules of hygiene, for example), religious practices - all regulate, *control* and construct the female body in various ways".[34] Femininity as self-surveillance

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[34]Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 175. For further discussion on this topic, see: Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990); Judith Butler's, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, London: Routledge), 1993; Peter Brooke, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

is precisely one of the themes West pursues relentlessly throughout her first article on the "World's Worst Failure". In describing the Frenchwoman, West uses a vocabulary which reflects an obsession with constraint and craftedness. The woman is "*trained* like an athlete for this elegance" and the placement and attitude of her body is always carefully calculated. She is able to make "a harmony out of prudent gestures of whose restraint she was without doubt inwardly conscious and proud" (p. 580). The narrator perceives that this woman is a perfect reflection of what she believes the world wishes to see.

In the careful arrangement of her body, the Frenchwoman makes herself into a kind of "objet d'art" to be admired for its perfect proportions and surfaces. Once the elegant woman has dressed herself, as Simone de Beauvoir points out: "[she] does not present *herself* to observation; she is, like the picture or statue, or the actor on the stage, an agent through whom is suggested someone not there - that is, the character she represents, but is not. It is this identification with something unreal, fixed; perfect ... as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her".[35] It is this cultivated passivity that West deplores, and while the Frenchwoman might be as beautiful as a statue, she is a corrupt form of art, emblematic of false consciousness.

West's portrait of the Frenchwoman suggests that not only does this "feminisation" of the body create a false art form, but it also cultivates an artificial naturalness: "The function of ornament is to make her [woman] share more intimately in nature and at the same time to remove her from the natural, it is to lend to palpitating life the rigour of artifice".[36] Throughout the description of the Frenchwoman, she and her adornments are compared with objects in nature. Her little shoes have "a bloom on them like a peach" and "the straight stem of her back grew from the foliage of her skirts with a grace that could not have been surpassed by any alteration". After her attack of neurasthenia, the Frenchwoman reappears

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[35] *The Second Sex*, p. 547.
[36] *The Second Sex*, p. 551.

"In a frock of great art[,] her body was stiff like a gardenia" (p. 581). But the natural imagery does not vivify, it fixes and de-animates instead. Through this analogy between the regulation of the body and flower imagery, West is also subverting a long literary tradition of associations between women and flowers. Whilst the flower still represents beauty in West's comparison, it is a beauty attained at the cost of "life" itself. The comparison reveals the stultifying and reductive nature of a system which insists that women are like flowers.

West's portrait penetrates the facade of the feminine and exposes it as such - - a mere mask, a masquerade. Her analysis of the Frenchwoman's femininity which has overshadowed and subdued the "very jolly and human grotesque" suggests that she was thinking within a framework which has been given a great deal of attention in recent criticism, particularly in the area of Lacanian theory. Stephen Heath, drawing on Lacan, describes masquerade as "a representation of femininity but then femininity is representation, the representation of the woman: 'images and symbols of the woman's cannot be isolated from images and symbols of the woman'".[37] Femininity is an elaborately painted mask which is placed over an absence or lack, for Lacan, the lack of the phallus. Thus, femininity can be seen as a mask which conceals non-identity.[38] Luce Irigarary extends and alters this idea somewhat, suggesting that:

> "femininity" is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity. The fact remains that this masquerade requires an *effort* on her part for which she is not compensated. Unless her pleasure comes simply from being chosen as an object of consumption or of desire by masculine "subjects".[39]

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[37]Stephen Heath, "Joan Rivière and Masquerade" in *Formations of Fantasy*, eds., Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 53. Heath quotes from *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 728.

[38]See Mary Russo "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory" in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 1986).

[39]Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One* (1977), trans., Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 84.

West's analysis of the various women in her articles conveys strikingly similar ideas. The Frenchwoman and the girl from Chicago are never named, they are reduced simply to their geographical labels, suggesting an absence of any personal identity. The only kind of selfhood the Frenchwoman has derives from her clothing. Her offer to tell the narrator the story of her life turns out to be a display of her wardrobe: "But instead she showed me her hats and dresses, and it seemed to do the poor soul as much good" (pp. 581-582). Reduced metonymically at first to items of clothing, the Frenchwoman is finally revealed to be a mere shadow, "a shadow cast on the wall by the bodies of idle men, which vanished when they were called away to the business of life".[40] The loss of the material body is a loss of selfhood, the loss of selfhood is a loss of power. In addition to this, the image of the woman as the shadow cast by men suggests that in the beauty system, men are "real" and women are "made up".[41] Women are "made up" literally in front of the mirror, and metaphorically, they are the reified image of male desire. In West's analysis, femininity can be seen as another form of masculinity.[42] While in West's texts the concentration on elegance reveals an absence which suggests some affinities with Lacanian readings of femininity, the nature of what is concealed is different. West does not suggest that femininity conceals the lack of a phallus. The masquerade of femininity instead involves the displacement and betrayal of an "essential" selfhood.

Women who succumb to the elegance system have been seduced by the male image of themselves. The pleasure the Frenchwoman derives from the perfection of her image is a masculine pleasure. It is this metaphorical transvestism which the narrator discovers in

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[40]"The Schoolmistress", *New Republic*, p. 301.

[41]Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell, "The Beauty System" in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds., *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 212.

[42]Stephen Heath makes a similar point in suggesting that "The display of femininity, the masquerade, hides an unconscious masculinity..." ("Joan Rivière and Masquerade", p. 55).

herself when she notices her ink-stained dress and which her article both criticises and attempts to rectify.

> And I - I was a black-browed thing scowling down on the inkstain that I saw reflected across the bodice of my evening dress. I was immeasurably distressed by this by-product of the literary life. It was a new evening dress, it was becoming, it was expensive. Already I was upsetting the balance of my nerves by silent rage; I knew I would wake up in the night and magnify it with an excited mind till it stained the world; that in the end I would probably write some article I did not in the least want to write in order to pay for a new one. In fact I would commit the same sin that I loathed in those two women. I would waste on personal ends vitality that should have been conserved for my work. (p. 583)

West redirects the sharp satire of her article against herself, through the revelation in the mirror of her collusion in the system and her participation in a community of false consciousness. The text itself becomes a realisation of the multiple mirrors which feature in the story, providing a mirror in which the narrator and the woman reader's gaze can meet. The text as mirror performs the role of truth-teller and provides a form of catharsis. In juxtaposing her stained dress with the act of writing, West forces the reader into an uneasy position of guilt and recognition. "The World's Worst Failure" might itself be the article written in response to the ruined dress and the guilt of the writer implicates the reader. The article has some of the characteristics of fashion identified by Roland Barthes where: "the juxtaposition of the excessively serious and the excessively frivolous, which is the basis of the rhetoric of fashion, merely reproduces, on the level of clothing, the mythic situation of women in Western civilization, at once sublime and childlike".[43] Thus the article can be seen as both a critique of fashion and femininity as well as a perhaps childish response to a spoilt dress. The implications of the article become as slippery as those of fashion, revealing West's recognition of the dangers of her own rhetoric. The distinctions between adornment,

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[43] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans., Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), p. 242.

femininity and feminism are in fact blurred and confused at times. These confusions stand in direct contrast to what most angers West and creates the sense of failure central to the article - the conventionally established equation between femininity, associated with the popular and the vulgar, and masculinized high culture. As Tania Modleski has pointed out, this equation can be extended to one of "femininity, consumption, and reading, on the one hand, and masculinity, production and writing on the other".[44] In West's article, the ink stain on her bodice reveals a double consciousness, a sense of being inside and outside the feminine. Participating both in the "fashion system", coded feminine, and the literary world, coded masculine, West discovers a fissure which she cannot close. The figuration of the feminine, as the evening dress, is disfigured by the literary life, and visa versa.[45] The ambiguities of feminine adornment become unambiguous obstacles for a woman writer who wishes to create an identity beyond the conventions she finds herself writing within.

West's sense of the literary and the professional as distinct from the domestic, maternal and especially feminine, was no doubt exacerbated by similar divisions in her own life during the war years. Seeking recognition within an essentially male literary establishment and a male mentorship, yet choosing to share and examine at close quarters the ordinary lives of women (see Chapter 4), West's response to these gendered divisions was intensified. At the same time, acknowledging her awkward complicity in the "elegance system" enabled her to begin re-examining her assumptions about masculinity and femininity.[46] In this way, "The World's Worst Failure" marks an important turning point,

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[44]Tania Modleski, "Femininity as Mas(s)querade: a feminist approach to culture" in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*, ed., Colin MacCabe, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 41. See also Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[45]I am indebted to Dr Merle Williams for this idea.

[46]In an ironic reversal of her self-criticism for excessive attention to adornment in "The World's Worst Failure", West spent the cheque for *The Return of the Soldier* on "the most expensive hat I have ever bought in my life ... The hat was a direct consequence of the Italian disaster. All these war horrors instead of making me ascetic make me turn furiously to sensuous delights. Such a pleasure to think that if all the world's gone

after which West began rethinking her gendered readings of professionalism, consumerism, high culture and mass culture.[47]

This re-assessment firstly took place in her post-war journalism. Between 1920 and 1922, West wrote a number of reviews of various women's novels for *The New Statesman*,[48] reflecting not only the current trend of the literary market, the fact that women, "as Miss Macaulay has put it in *Mystery at Geneva*, are news",[49] but also her own preoccupation with the nature of "women's writing". Although her declaration that "Nearly every good novel which has ever been written by a woman bears a stamp which proclaims beyond all doubt that it is the work of a woman"[50] echoes the kind of essentialism she questions in the "World's Worst Failure" articles, she qualified her claims by providing some historical and material context for them. She perceived the presence of "a turbulent romanticism" as "a gusto in creating exciting events, which is natural enough in a sex that is too often condemned to spend its life waiting for things which do not happen".[51] Questions of what made a woman writer distinctive, and more specifically, in what ways could women writers redefine themselves within and away from contemporary political and literary frameworks, continued to interest West throughout the twenties.[52]

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wrong that hat at least is right ... I think there is an impulse to reassure oneself that life's worth living by simple pleasures" (Letter to Sylvia Lynd, Thursday 1917, Boston University. Qtd from a draft of Bonnie Kime Scott's edition of selected letters).

[47]See my article, "Addressing Femininity in the Twenties".

[48]She continued to write for the *Daily News* after the war ended and in 1919 she began writing theatre reviews for the journal *Outlook*. Her most important associations were with *The New Statesman* and *Time and Tide*. *The New Statesman*, founded by Beatrice and Sydney Webb, was a "journal of dissent, of scepticism, of enquiry, of nonconformity" (Edward Hyams, *The New Statesman: The History of the First Fifty Years 1913-1963*, London: Longmans, 1963, p. xiii). She continued to use her reviews in this journal, (described as usually very entertaining and often "not merely reviewing" but "criticism at a high level" Hyams, p. 96), as she had always done, as spaces in which to test her own aesthetics as much as those of the author she was reviewing.

[49]*New Statesman* December 2, 1922, p. 270.

[50]*New Statesman* July 10, 1920, p. 394.

[51]*NS*, July 10, 1920, p. 394.

[52]During the twenties, West also began contributing to a variety of popular journals and magazines, as well as to 'highbrow' literary and political papers.

The preoccupations of the "World's Worst Failure" series and the shifts it anticipated began to emerge in oblique and fragmented ways in West's second novel, *The Judge*. Here, the analysis of femininity became an intense engagement with representations of motherhood, and with the ways in which women's lives remained restricted by a variety of prevailing ideologies and beliefs. Breaking with the narrative form of *The Return of the Soldier*, West began to experiment in *The Judge* with genres conventionally associated with women writers and readers ("New Woman" and Gothic narratives for example), reflecting her post-war journalistic interests and re-positioning of herself as a professional woman writer.

Chapter 7

The Quest for Origins in *The Judge*: Texts, Maternity and Sexual Difference

In *The Judge,* West tries to explore the nature of sexual difference and its consequences for men and women in the post-war era in a more extended and complex way than was possible in the "World's Worst Failure" series. The novel is at once a culmination of the various representations of women West had previously analysed in her fiction and journalism, especially through metaphors of femininity and motherhood, and a self-conscious exploration of the different narratives and myths that shape women's lives. In a novel concerned with origins, West looks back to her earliest attempts at fiction, especially "The Sentinel", while drawing on a variety of other forms - autobiographical, scientific and mythic. In this exploration of the past, West also experimented with forms that challenged those of her literary mentors, whilst accommodating the lessons she had learned from them.

In 1922, West wrote a postcard to her sister, Lettie, asking her to find a certain book:

> I read somewhere a passage from one of Adler's books in which he speaks of man trying to establish his equilibrium in the universe against his crushing sense of impotence and creating all manner of myths to help him. Do you know the passage - or the book? If so could you buy it for me - as I want it for my new book on Feminism which I want to start as soon as I get back (AM Collection).[1]

West enlarges on her interest in the mythic as a means to understanding life's vicissitudes in a review of Katherine Mansfield's *The Garden Party*: "And one cannot believe that the future which we do not know will disprove that it is poetry which is the truth, and that the simple view of life which shaped yesterday's prose was anything but a myth invented by man to help him before he felt strong enough to face life's lack of simplicity".[2] At this point she had just

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[1]West visited Spain with H.G. Wells in 1922 (see Glendinning, p. 77) She sent several undated postcards to Lettie during this trip.

[2]*New Statesman* "Notes on Novels", March 18, 1922.

seen the publication of her own work of mythic proportions, *The Judge*, which begins with an exploration of the experiences of a young, impoverished typist and ardent suffragette Ellen Melville, whose feminist idealism and potential for happiness is thwarted as she is drawn into the romance and Gothic melodrama of the Yaverland family. The first half of the novel offers a version of West's own teenage experiences as a suffragette in Edinburgh, selling *Votes for Women* on the street and attending suffrage meetings. Ellen's engagement to Richard Yaverland, older, more experienced and romanticised by her, and the death of her mother, alters the course of her life. The second half of the novel dramatically shifts focus to Marion Yaverland, Richard's mother, after Ellen, now engaged to be married to Richard, travels from her native Edinburgh to stay with Marion in Essex. Marion, whose larger-than-life presence is intrinsically linked with her family home, surrounded by the marshes and sea, has had a turbulent past; as the former mistress of a neighbouring landowner, an unmarried mother and a victim of a rape within an arranged marriage. In a plot which becomes progressively more melodramatic, Marion eventually commits suicide in order to allow Richard to love Ellen more fully, and Richard murders his half-brother, Roger. Ellen is left alone at the end with the prospect of separation from Richard who will be sentenced for murder. In a conclusion quite in keeping with the melodrama of the preceding pages, the novel closes with the implication that history is about to repeat itself in Ellen's life, when her own future as a single mother is implied.

In her postcard to Lettie, West's reference to Adler and the use of myth to create meaning, makes explicit her own understanding of the importance of narrative. As Christine van Bohemeen notes: "Inventing, narrating, we understand and explain who and what we are. In imposing a narrative pattern upon our experience and ideas, we create the meaning and significance of our lives and ourselves. In giving shape and form we determine sequence,

allocate polarities, institute hierarchy, and thus reproduce the predetermined semantic blueprint of our culture".[3] Story-telling and the use of archetypal narratives, especially myth, are characteristic of West's early fiction and journalism and several critics have commented on West's preoccupation with myth as a way of both analysing and structuring material.[4] As Kime Scott points out:

> In both her fiction and her prose works of social analysis, West seeks to detect and explore patterns of dominance and difference that shape human behavior, particularly in the mechanized, war-torn, patriarchal world of the early twentieth century. She repeatedly calls these patterns "myths", suggesting their wide influence, but also their constructedness and susceptibility to challenge and eventual change. West reads her myths in theology, history, literature, art, clothing, crafts, architecture, and personal dialogues.[5]

In discussing *The Judge*, Shirley Peterson has suggested that "The mythical focus of the novel serves as a female counterpoint to the band of psychological forces determined to secure male sexual domination. In writing about the suffragettes and the woman's movement from a postwar, post-vote perspective, West redirected the female quest for autonomy into archetypal territory that offsets the waste land mentality of war with feminine restorative powers".[6] The mythical focus goes back in time beyond the waste land of the war, however, to both the primordial swamps of Darwinian evolution and the desolation following the expulsion from Eden. Embedded in the 'realist' and the 'Gothic' narratives of Part One and Two respectively, are a variety of mythic and 'scientific' narratives. Part two of *The Judge* especially centralises West's preoccupation with origins through a setting evocative of the primeval, through the Edenic couple and through the mythic mother, Marion, who is both

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[3]Christine van Boheemen, *The Novel as Family Romance: Language, Gender and Authority from Fielding to Joyce* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 13.

[4]Of course, West shared her interest in the mythic with many of her "modernist" contemporaries, for example James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and especially D.H. Lawrence. See Cristopher Nash (sic), "Myth and Modern Literature" in *The Context of English Literature 1900-1930*, ed. Michael Bell, (London: Methuen & Co., 1980), pp. 160-185.

[5]*Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 2, p. 129.

[6]Peterson, "The Emancipation of the Heroine", p. 181.

judge and godhead, originator and destroyer. Ellen and Richard are figured as Adam and Eve and the reverberations of Old Testament myth are extended into the story of Cain and Abel, as Richard slays his brother at the end of the novel. Threaded through these ancient Hebraic stories are Greek myths re-interpreted by Freud, of Oedipus and Electra, as the excessive love Marion and Richard have for each other destroys the relationship between Ellen and Richard. In this novel, Freudian and biblical narratives are entangled with a Darwinian story of evolution, and of heredity and environment. By evoking these narratives or myths, West set out to explore a personal past and also a history of feminism, thereby revealing some of the shaping forces of women's writing in the early twentieth-century.

West's sense of narrative as an interpretative instrument of individual and universal experiences, provides a useful starting point for an analysis of *The Judge*. Susan Stanford Friedman's premise that "narrative is a form of linguistic disguise - in Freud's terms, a manifest form that reveals latent and forbidden desire as a compromise between the conflicting needs of expression and repression", in her important analysis of the ways in which early drafts or "serial texts" offer crucial insights into women's writing, provides an incisive model for my own reading of *The Judge*.[7] Drawing mostly on Freud, but also on critics such as Frederic Jameson and Jonathan Culler, Stanford Friedman proposes reading women's narratives "psycho-politically - seeing women's writing as an insistent record - a trace, a web, a palimpsest, a rune, a disguise of what has not or cannot be spoken directly because of the external and internalized censors of patriarchal social order".[8] In her analysis, Friedman discusses the significance of earlier drafts of texts which, "Read intertexually, ... are potentially the 'textual unconscious' of the 'final' text", and of "serial texts on related

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[7]Susan Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed in Women's Narrative" *Journal of Narrative Technique* Vol. 13, (Winter 1989), p. 141.

[8]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 142.

subjects and characters", which can be read "as a composite text whose parts are like the distinct but interconnecting layers of a palimpsestic psyche".[9] Stanford Friedman's modulated application of her approach to Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and its extant drafts also provides a useful framework.[10] Adopting and adapting these models, I will consider the unfinished novels, "The Sentinel" and *Adela,* as simultaneously "drafts" and serial texts in relation to *The Judge.*[11] The ways in which the originating text, "The Sentinel" is altered and reshaped through *Adela* into *The Judge*, and the significance of these shifts is the subject of the first section of this chapter. Metaphors of origin and innocence are central to these shifts, indicative of West's different explorations of the ways in which women's lives are affected by their own sexuality, by social expectations and by mythic and scientific narratives. This analysis will be extended into a consideration of *The Judge* as a re-interpretation and rewriting of the Genesis myth alongside a narrative of Darwinian evolution and Freudian explanation. Motherhood as a metaphor for origin and 'otherness' emerges as an overwhelming force in *The Judge*, and I will end with a consideration of the ways in which the text becomes both a re-examination of the nature of motherhood (in the light of the post war cult of motherhood), and a quest for selfhood and self-expression. Through this

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[9]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 145.

[10]An extended comparison of *The Voyage Out* and *The Judge* has yet to be written. Although West left no evidence in letters or diaries that she had read *The Voyage Out*, the similarities between the two are striking. Both narratives work within and subvert the traditional sequence of courtship and marriage when Rachel Vinrace dies (*Voyage Out*) and Ellen Melville is to become a single mother (*The Judge*). In both texts, "reading functions as a trope for education" (Stanford Friedman, "Virginia Woolf's Pedagogical Scenes of Reading: *The Voyage Out*, *The Common Reader* and her Common Readers", *Modern Fiction Studies* 38 Spring 1992, p. 109) and for self-definition. Rachel Vinrace reads modern novels against the grain of those texts recommended by her male mentors. Ellen Melville is steeped in the masculine adventure novel and romantic poetry. The voyage out to South America in Woolf's novel is recalled in West's through Richard Yaverland's travels there and his resemblance to "an Elizabethan seaman" (p. 41). Like *The Voyage Out*, West's novel can also be seen as an attempt to rewrite and re-invent the Genesis myth. (See Christine Froula's "Rewriting Genesis: Gender and Culture in Twentieth-Century Texts", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 7.2 Fall 1988, pp. 197-220).

[11]Stanford Friedman considers two kinds of textual clusters: "One kind of cluster is made up of what we conventionally consider the "final" text and its surviving "draft" or "drafts". Another kind is composed of serial texts on related subjects and characters" ("The Return of the Repressed, pp. 144-145). "The Sentinel" and *Adela* can be read as drafts, used consciously or unconsciously for the first part of *The Judge*, as well as for thematically related texts.

approach, I hope to provide, in passing, some answers to questions that *The Judge* provokes: why does West return to a pre-war setting for her 1922 novel, and what conclusions may be drawn about the unstable form of this novel, one in which vestiges of the "New Woman" and Suffrage novel[12] co-exist with popular genres such as melodrama and the Gothic, as well as with features which can be described as modernist?

The Genealogy of *The Judge* and the Return of the Repressed

> Here the long preparation of earth's events and their endurance would be evident. It would breed people like Marion, in whom a sense of the bearing of the past on the present was so powerful that it was often difficult to know of what she was speaking..." (*J*, p. 229).

Although it was not published until 1922, four years after *The Return of the Soldier,* an earier version of *The Judge* had already been conceived and begun in 1917, soon after the publication of the "World's Worst Failure" series and the completion of *The Return of the Soldier*. The progress of this version is recorded in West's letters to S.K. Ratcliffe, who was at this time a mentor both for her fiction and non-fiction writing. In July 1917 she notes that book one of "The Judge" is completed and that "there will be at least 9 books" (Yale Archive). Later that year she tells him that: "The Judge will not be finished till the autumn, allowing for my slow rate. For see they have just got married, and her mother has to die, and his mother has to die, and he has to murder his brother and be hanged, and its really only then that exciting things begin to happen" (dated Christmas 1917, Yale Archive). Interspersed with her comments on the progress and delays of the novel are apologies about unfinished articles, reminding him of her difficult personal circumstances: "Remember that since I was twenty I have had exactly seven weeks of the working conditions that people of my age and

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[12]Jane Marcus also classifies the novel within the sub-genre of suffrage fiction ("A Voice of Authority", p. 243).

occupation usually have. In those seven weeks I've done no end of my novel and worked off my arrears for the *News* and written this stuff for the *New Republic*" (Christmas, 1917, Yale Archive). Another version of the novel is noted by Glendinning who records H.G. Wells's irritation at "Rebecca's failure to stick to her original plan. The central figure, he knew, had been going to be a judge who collapsed in a brothel, recognizing in his seizure that the woman he is with is the wife of a man he sentenced for murder".[13] The "original plan" features a plot of crime and punishment, reminiscent of Dostoevsky, about whom West had written several reviews. In the published novel, the brothel scene is replaced by a variation on the 1917 plan, involving marriage or pairing off, the deaths of the mothers, the murder of a brother.[14]

While West abandoned the plot which centred on a brothel scenario,[15] she retained the figure of the judge, but in a subversive and unexpected representation - the role of judge, with all its associations of masculinity, authority and control, is applied not only to a woman, but to a mother. This gender reversal featured among the many grounds on which Wells attacked the novel. He claimed that West only kept the title of *The Judge* "because that had been announced by her publisher for two years".[16] Glendinning, in sympathy with Wells's

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[13]Glendinning, pp. 80-81. Wells's negative response was echoed by those of a variety of contemporary readers; from Virginia Woolf's witty dismissal of the novel as a "stout, generous, lively, voluminous novel", but one which "burst like an overstuffed sausage". (Letters Aug 18, 1922) to a review in *The New Statesman* which notes that: "Miss Rebecca West shows herself to be as a novelist - it will be a surprise, perhaps to many readers of her criticisms - an unbridled romantic" (October 28, 1922, p. 114). Vigorous attacks on the novel have appeared in more recent criticism: Deakin describes it as "sentimental" (*Rebecca West*, p. 139), Jane Miller as "occasionally... shatteringly bad" (*Women Writing about Men*, pp. 115-116) and Samuel Hynes dismisses it as "a long, melodramatic story of sex, guilt, and power, interesting for the autobiographical beginning in Edinburgh, and for remarks about the nature of man-woman relations, but imaginatively lifeless" (Samuel Hynes, ed. *Rebecca West: A Celebration*, London: Macmillan, 1977, p. xii).

[14]The manuscripts of these interim versions do not appear to have survived, although there is a short section of a revised draft (Part II, Chapters V1-1X) in the Tulsa Archive.

[15]West does not, however, discard the idea of the brothel and its associations completely. In Part One it emerges that Ellen's employment as a legal secretary arose out of her meeting with her future employer in court. Attending court because poverty and illness had prevented her mother from paying the rent, Ellen meets Mactavish James who has been involved in a case concerning a brothel. (*The Judge*, p. 165). The implied connections between Ellen's vulnerability and prostitution are not coincidental; the connection is made several times in the novel.

[16]Qtd in Glendinning, p. 81.

attack, suggests that the epigram of the novel, that "Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father", was used by West "to justify her now inapposite title".[17] These comments cannot be entirely dismissed, but they offer only a partial truth. The subversion of expectations implied by the title *The Judge* invokes, by association, that of the earlier novel, "The Sentinel", releasing a concealed or even repressed context for *The Judge*. "The Sentinel" title encodes both male authority and the female appropriation of that authority, (suffragette militancy) as well as associations with feminine subjections, namely prostitution and, by extension, female sexuality as a whole (See Chapter One). The maternal judge who sentences her children is "a different surface of the palimpsest"[18] into which the story of the unchaste sentinel, Adela Furnival erupts, offering a narrative that not only questions but indicts the developing cult of motherhood of the post war era.

The very notion of "The Sentinel" text as a "return of the repressed" situates *The Judge* in an immediate historical and literary context of the First World War, shell shock and *The Return of the Soldier*. With its obvious Freudian overtones and its shell-shocked soldier,[19] *The Return of the Soldier* is, in part, preoccupied with the reasons for forgetting, Chris Baldry's "resolution not to know" (*RS*, pp. 138-139) and the need to remember, to recognise "that there is a draught that we must drink or not be fully human. I knew that one must know the truth" (*RS*, p. 182). Though in a very different way, *The Judge* is also about remembering; Marion, who remembers in her nightmares and her sleeplessness her past experiences as a mistress, shamed unmarried mother and victim of rape; Ellen who remembers her dead mother and her mother's neglect at the hands of her father, Richard's memories of his mistress in South America and of his mother's memories, West's own

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[17]Glendinning, p. 81.
[18]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 148.
[19]See my discussion in Chapter 5 of West's early acquaintance with Freud's writing.

memories on which her novel is based. The novel is, as several critics have noted, strongly autobiographical in its depiction of the suffragettes and of the larger-than-life Marion Yaverland. According to Jane Marcus, "Rebecca West believed she had expressed there her truest, "instinctive self" in its autobiographical force. 'I damned near found myself in the millrace,' she said of the tragic intensity of the passion for Wells which inspired it".[20] J.R. Hammond, who describes the novel as "an extraordinary personal document", suggests that the novel is central to an understanding of West's writing:

> *The Judge* is such an idiosyncratic work and possesses so many insights into Rebecca's mind and emotions that one turns to it again and again when seeking to understand her personality. It is indispensable to an appreciation of her character and her outlook on the world, for in this novel she expressed so much of her personal self. It also has a central place in her development as a writer because in the turmoil of its composition she matured as a woman and as an artist, coming to terms with her own emotions in the process.[21]

If *The Judge* offers a version of self-analysis[22] and self-revelation, the insights it offers into West the writer, as well as into literary and socio/political contexts are intensified through an examination of what has been repressed or at least remembered differently. In later life, West never alluded to her earliest novel, "The Sentinel", effectively disguised by the pseudonym 'Isabel Lancashire', nor her attempt to revise that novel in *Adela*.[23] West returned to these earliest narratives, consciously or unconsciously, and rewrote them, many years later, into Part One of *The Judge*.[24] There is a useful analogy to be made here with

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[20]Marcus, "A Voice of Authority", p. 244.

[21]Hammond, p. 128.

[22]Stanford Friedman focuses her model of "the return of the repressed" on three texts by H.D. which are shown to be acts of self-analysis and self-healing. ("The Return of the Repressed in Women's Narrative" p. 147). See also her comments on autobiographical fiction as "writing cure" in "Virginia Woolf's Pedagogical Scenes of Reading", p. 116).

[23]The "Ellen Yaverland" fragment in the manuscript notebook containing *Indissoluble Matrimony* offers another version of the Adela Furnival story which anticipates *The Judge*, (Tulsa Archive).

[24]West retains some striking images and descriptions through all three narratives. For example, the description of the railway running through West Saltgreave in "The Sentinel", "that from north to south stretched a dark gleaming ribbon jewelled with rich red and green lights" ("The Sentinel", p. 59-60) is barely altered in *Adela* which opens with a vivid portrayal of Saltgreave: "She pretended to luxury, for the red and green signals on the railway-line that sundered her straightly from north to South gleamed richly like jewels on the ribbon of darkness" (*Adela*, p. 18). Ten years later in *The Judge*, the same image is used in Part Two

Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, which underwent a series of revisions over a number of years. In her analysis of the extant drafts of Woolf's novel, Louise DeSalvo comments on the obsessiveness of this writing:

> Clearly, there was something in the material with which Woolf was working that did not allow her to let go of this first novel, that would not permit her to release it to the world, that dictated that she rewrite it again and again, changing it and modifying it to satisfy some deeply-felt and perhaps only dimly-perceived artistic and emotional needs.[25]

The same obsessiveness is evident in the sequence of West's texts where there are several characters or even types and events to which West returns. The figure of the rebellious young woman as schoolgirl and suffragette is reworked in each narrative: Adela Furnival's militant activism in Manchester and London in "The Sentinel", Adela's amazonian attack on the men who threaten her in *Adela* and Ellen Melville's suffragette activities, selling *Votes for Women* on the streets of Edinburgh and attending suffrage meetings. The ordeals of suffragette activism endured by Adela Furnival (in "The Sentinel"), derived mainly from the narratives of others, are excluded from *The Judge*, or at least, Ellen's love affair with Richard and the death of her mother interrupt her feminist activism that might otherwise have led to prison and the hunger-strike. A preoccupation with fragile, even weak mothers and degenerate fathers is also evident in *Adela* and *The Judge*. Adela's seduction in "The Sentinel" by the decadent architect figure is anticipated in *Adela* and rewritten as the more threatening scene in which Mr Philip James contemplates seducing, if not raping Ellen in Part One of *The Judge*. Just as "Woolf's first novel contains the idea that a novel in progress will change as the life experiences of its author change",[26] West's earliest suffragette fictions are later

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as Ellen arrives in London by train: "but a train far down the line pulled out of the station and disclosed a knot of red and green signal lights that warmed the eye and thence the heart as jewels do..." (p. 202).

[25]Louise A. De Salvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 11-12.

[26]DeSalvo, p. 1.

embedded in a text about feminist ideals which are swept away, reflecting aspects of the upheavals of her own life and also, allegorically, of the history of post-war feminism. While West as "Isabel Lancashire" could not imagine or envisage an ending for her first suffragette stories as she wrote them, their incompleteness can be seen as psychic gaps to which she returned as the story of her own life unravelled.

In her discussion of writers who return to the same narrative repeatedly, through drafts or variant texts, Stanford Friedman notes the way in which "[D]ifferent 'drafts' of a final text can be interpreted as 'repetitions' in which the author is 'working through' conflicts in an effort (conscious or unconscious) to move from 'repetition' to remembering".[27] While her account suggests that the earliest drafts or texts will be the most repressed, Stanford Friedman highlights the importance of

> reading "both ways", instead of regarding the "final" text as the endpoint and teleological goal of "drafts", or instead of reading texts solely as autonomous entities. Repression and resistance can be present at both ends of the process. Rather than searching for the "authentic" version, this approach regards all versions as part of a larger composite, palimpsestic text whose parts or imperfectly erased layers interact according to a psycho-political dynamic.[28]

Reading "The Sentinel", *Adela* and Part One of *The Judge* both ways, the relocation of her suffragette heroine from the Midlands setting of "The Sentinel" and *Adela* to the more directly autobiographical Edinburgh setting and, most importantly, her repeated return to rewriting her feminist heroine, highlights West's writing processes, and the forces that shaped that writing.

All three heroines in these texts are initially depicted as looking from inside the contained, private sphere of Victorian/Edwardian womanhood, outwards, both literally and metaphorically. The three narratives open with images of restlessness and boredom: Adela,

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[27]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 146.
[28]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 146.

the weary scholar and frustrated inhabitant of her uncle's household ("The Sentinel"); the fiery Adela who gazes out of the window over Saltgreave (*Adela*) and Ellen who weeps as she sits by the window overlooking Edinburgh Castle, thinking of her thwarted aspirations: "It was seventeen years since she had first taken up her seat in the world's hall (and it was none too comfortable a seat), but there was still no sign of the concert beginning" (*J*, p. 10).[29] In the more idealistic "Sentinel", Adela's desire to become a science mistress is realised, although attention to her profession is soon sublimated by her suffragette activities. The heroine's wish to study science in *Adela* is frustrated by poverty and her uncle's refusal of financial help to supplement the scholarship she has won; her alternative and much despised career as a typist becomes that of Ellen Melville in *The Judge*. Ellen misses a scholarship exam due to her mother's illness and rent arrears which have to be dealt with in court (*J*, p. 165). Ellen's diminished opportunities and career prospects, the abject poverty she and her mother endure (they also lack the wealthy relatives of the two Adelas), make her a much more vulnerable character than her predecessors. Like both Adelas, Ellen sees herself as a new kind of woman, although she is unconscious of the flaws inherent in this self-image: "Ellen thought herself a wonderful new sort of woman who was going to be just like a man; she would have been surprised if she had known how many of her stern-browed ambitions, how much of her virile swagger of life, were not the invention of her own soul, but had been suggested to her by an old woman who liked to pretend her daughter was a son" (*J*, p. 44).[30]

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[29]This Jamesian metaphor sets the tone and style for Part One of *The Judge*. A variety of critics have commented on the Jamesian resonances in the novel. See, for example, Peter Wolfe, who describes *The Judge* as thematically "applying Jamesian aesthetics to the pos-Jamesian world". Peter Wolfe, *Rebecca West: Artist and Thinker* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 35.

[30]See, in comparison, Adela's awareness of the fiction of this new womanhood: "She knew that her adventure had been the exploit of a message-boy well-read in penny dreadfuls" (*A*, p. 37). For further analysis of this episode, see Chapter Two.

Vulnerable because her identity is founded on fictions,[31] she is still more vulnerable because of her ignorance and innocence. As Kate Flint points out, for writers of New Woman fiction "'Innocence' and 'purity' were synonymous for dangerous gaps in their knowledge concerning social, and in particular sexual, relations".[32] In this way, Ellen is an archetypal heroine in the New Woman mode and her innocence forms a striking contrast with that of her predecessors, the two Adelas who gain or have knowledge Ellen only acquires at the end of the novel.

The first book of "The Sentinel", which focuses on the schoolgirl Adela, is in part preoccupied with the idea of sexual awakening. Adela, described as "exquisite with the perfume of awakening sex" (S, **p. 9**, Book I, IV, 17), is susceptible to the charms of Neville Ashcroft and to her own sexual instincts. Their mutual attraction is described as an "animal crisis" and, in an interesting sentence, marked out for revision, they are described as "two marionettes, manipulated by a Force whose ideas of human are often as coarse and unrefined as her [[]] origin is primeval" (S, **p. 9**, Book I, IV, 18). With Hardyesque resonances, these descriptions reflect an extraordinarily explicit attempt to represent the nature of human sexuality as an impersonal force. Adela's sudden and terrible recognition of her own sexual responsiveness provokes another revelation: "'On my honour', I - she turned her face to him, terrible in laughter - 'I had no idea passion ever troubled respectable people'" (S, **p. 11**, Book I, V, 22). Within the first few pages of her first novel, West exposes the dangers of ignorance imposed on women in late-Victorian/Edwardian society and the hypocrisy of that society. Like Tess, who accuses her mother of somehow colluding in her "fall" by allowing her to

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[31]Anne Norton notes that Ellen has "appropriated male stories because they are full of freedom and excitement, and because she knew no female narratives so attractive" ("Rebecca West's Ironic Heroine: Beauty as Tragedy in *The Judge*", *ELT.* 34:3, 1991, p. 306). Ellen's longing for adventure has sources in the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson (*J*, p. 20) and Richard Harding Davis: "I'm not saying he's an artist, but the man has force (*J*, p. 19).

[32]Flint, *The Woman Reader*, pp. 294.

remain ignorant,[33] the motherless Adela accuses society as a whole of making sexuality a gender and class taboo. In her revised version, *Adela*, West depicts Adela as more precocious. Mutual attraction between Adela and Arnold Neville is hinted at before the narrative breaks off, but it is an attraction that this Adela could identify and to which she could knowingly respond. Her sense of her own physicality, her sensuous response to Maud (her uncle's niece) and to the unknown man on the train whose "expression of soft, casual voluptuousness ... was not discourteous, [it] was not evil" is that of a rebellious and more sophisticated character than Adela as schoolgirl in "The Sentinel" or the later Ellen Melville. Adela deplores the middle class morality of Saltgreave where "one was ashamed of one's most decent joys" (*A*, p. 47). Adela in "The Sentinel" learns to detest society's hypocrisy through her experiences as a suffragette, in particular, through her encounters with prostitutes and the unmarried Rosie Essletree who has killed her child. Ellen Melville knows much less. She is a more androgynous figure than her passionate and sensuous predecessors, schoolgirlish in "her shapeless blue pinafore" (*J*, p. 20) and she is characterised as "awfully like a boy" (*J*, p. 105) by Richard Yaverland. Well versed in suffragette rhetoric on the "iniquitous marriage-laws" (*J*, p. 161) and aware of the status quo of "one law for the man and another for the woman" (*J*, p. 136), she is ignorant about male and female sexuality, about what lay at the heart of her suffragette heroine's speech on "the double standard of morality and the treatment of unmarried mothers" (*J*, p. 57). Richard, who attends the suffrage meeting with Ellen recognises her profound innocence: "her mind was as white as her hair was red" (*J*, p. 66). Ellen is, as Ann Norton suggests, "the proverbial blank slate",[34]

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[33]See Kate Flint's discussion of this in *The Woman Reader*, pp. 300-301.

[34]Ann Norton's "Rebecca West's Ironic Heroine: Beauty as Tragedy in *The Judge*" (*ELT*, Vol 34: 3, 1991), offers a particularly useful analysis. Drawing on Philip Ray's account of the novel as Gothic romance (Philip Ray, "*The Judge* Reexamined: Rebecca West's Underrated Gothic Romance", *English Literature in Transition* Vol. 31, (3), 1988, pp. 297-307), Norton suggests that Ellen's innocence and vulnerability characterise her as "a Gothic (or romance) heroine" (Norton, p. 302). For Norton, Richard forces Ellen into his Gothic Melodrama - it is her blankness that "enables Richard to dictate her drama, and her beauty - a trait Ellen admirably, if

disempowered by her poverty, her ignorance and her idealism.

Ellen's innocence is a strategy, a "site of transformation"[35] through which the earlier narratives, in particular, West's own earliest New Woman/Suffrage fictions, are both repressed and remembered. On one level, the transformation can be seen as an act of disguise or self-censorship, similar to that of Woolf's transformation of Rachel Vinrace from "an intelligent, outspoken, critical young feminist" to "a vague and innocently naive dreamer".[36] West's portrayal of Ellen in Part One of the novel can be seen in the same light as Woolf's reworking of her earlier drafts of *The Voyage Out* which resulted from her sense that those drafts were too personal, too revealing . Adela's early sexual encounter ("The Sentinel") is displaced onto the mother figure, Marion Yaverland in *The Judge*. The close, quasi-homoerotic friendships between the suffragettes in "The Sentinel" are completely erased in *The Judge*, where Ellen is isolated in relation to other women. Finally, the fantasy of a hero such as Langlad, whose feminine qualities are appreciated as much as his masculine ones, and whose sexual innocence is explored in some detail, provides a striking contrast with the more conventional figure of Richard Yaverland. While West situates the novel in an obviously autobiographical setting, suggesting that the narrative is more "truthful", Ellen's innocence conceals the precocious, interrogative narratives and experienced heroines of her teenage years. Stanford Friedman, commenting on Woolf's "self-censorship", notes that:

> Revision in women's writing in the modern period often involved a sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious negotiation between the desire to speak and the need to repress what is forbidden in their narratives of modernity. As a result, final drafts of texts often contained highly disguised

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ignorantly, has not captitalized on - ... that he uses for his own purposes" (Norton, p. 306).

[35]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 148.

[36]Elizabeth Heine, "The Earlier *Voyage Out*: Virginia Woolf's First Novel", *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 82 (1979), p. 294. DeSalvo sees this transformation as a flaw: "It was Woolf's reclothing of Rachel Vinrace as innocent victim rather than as a woman both fascinated with and repelled by her own sexuality which robbed her of her vitality as a character and which seriously undermined the fundamental structure of her novel" (DeSalvo, p. 102). See also James Haule, "Virginia Woolf's Revisions of *The Voyage Out:* Some New Evidence" in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Fall 1996, pp. 309-321).

> forms of desire and social critique to which we have partial access through a vertical reading of all the drafts as a composite text.[37]

While Stanford Friedman acknowledges that self-censorship offers one explanation for the transformations in Woolf's first novel, it is not the only one. She suggests that Woolf was able to confront in the later drafts what she had repressed in the earlier ones, the fragility of her own physical and mental health at the time of writing and,[38] through her "repeated return to the scene of writing the novel functioned within her construction, through writing, of a new subjectivity".[39] West's conscious or unconscious return to her earliest narratives comes with the hindsight of the war and her own experience as "New Woman" and "Freewoman" who has somehow succumbed to the conventional role of mother and mistress. In rewriting this narrative, the older Rebecca West confronts her first literary persona and her earlier idealised self, both as an act of nostalgia and one of irony.[40]

Ellen is portrayed in an ironic light from the outset. Her romantic yearning for adventure: "It's something more like the French Revolution I'm wanting. Something grand and coloured. Swords, and people being rescued, and things like that" (*J*, p. 19), makes her vulnerable to the romance of the books she reads and to the romance Richard Yaverland embodies.[41] Not only is she mesmerized by his "sea-going air" (*J*, p. 26) and his tales of South America but also his story of the Marquis d'Italica who turned his dead wife's bed into

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[37]Susan Stanford Friedman, "Spatialization, Narrative Theory, and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*", in *Ambiguous Discourses: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers,* ed. Kathy Mezei, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996), p. 126.

[38]Stanford Friedman, "Virginia Woolf's Pedagogical Scenes of Reading", p. 116.

[39]Stanford Friedman, "Spatialization, Narrative Theory, and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*", p. 127.

[40]From one point of view, the repression evident in *The Judge* is the consequence of compression. The suffragette story of "The Sentinel" and *Adela,* in which a possible future self is imagined, is cut short by a sequence of events which shift attention away from the suffragette narrative to one which must consider issues of maternity and female sexuality in greater depth.

[41] Friedman discuss the danger of Rachel Vinrace (*The Voyage Out*) *becoming* what she reads: "Rachel is captured by what she reads - from books, from life and from their intertexutality. Swallowed up in the complex of cultural texts, Rachel cannot negotiate a pathway of her own, a *Bildung* that can balance desire and a separate identity" ("Virginia Woolf's Pedagogic Scenes of Reading", p. 121). cf. Conrad's *Lord Jim* and the possible bad effects of reading light literature.

an altar. Ellen's naive reading of this story: "Love must be a great compensation to those who do not have political ambitions" (*J*, p. 40) is an ironic foreshadowing of what happens to her own ambitions by the end of the novel. Ellen is similarly attracted to the heroic presence and narratives of the suffragettes: "Mrs Ormiston, the mother of the famous rebels Brynhild, Melissa, and Guendolen, and herself a heroine, lifted a pale face where defiance dwelt among the remains of dark loveliness like a beacon lit on a grey castle keep" (*J*, p. 50). Through Ellen's rapture, West recalls her own, unadulterated worship of the suffragette heroines, expressed so vividly in the descriptions of figures such as Mary Gerald and Psyche Charteris in "The Sentinel". Virginal and androgynous, Ellen is emblematic of one of the icons of pre-war feminism, Joan of Arc. As a way of criticising and repressing her earlier stance, West juxtaposes Ellen's enthusiasm for the suffragette speakers with Richard's more cynical response.[42] In contrast to Ellen's elated appreciation of the beautifully attired speakers, Richard is irritated by the dress code, which he sees as distracting and deluding: "And she wore a preposterous dress ... But this blue thing was neither sturdy covering nor the brilliant fantasy it meant to be. It had the spurious glitter of an imitation jewel" (*J*, p. 60). He rejects the message of the speech on immorality, seeing that "the spirit that makes people talk coarsely about sex is the same spirit that makes men act coarsely to women" (*J*, p. 66). West's own voice can be heard through Richard's musing, recalling her journalistic attacks, written before and during the war, on the excessive cultivation of femininity of the suffragettes, and the puritanism of suffragette rhetoric.

Richard is not, however, merely a foil for Ellen's naive enthusiasm. In his response to the suffragette speeches, he reveals both consciously and unconsciously, perspectives as

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[42]The juxtaposition is emphasised by the way in which West structures the narrative at this point. The suffragette meeting is presented through Ellen's eyes first, and then through Richard's, who is standing elsewhere in the hall. Both are distracted from listening properly by an awareness of the other's presence, and both sections end with the same line: "She/He looked across the hall at him/her. Their eyes met" (*J*, p. 58, 71).

flawed as Ellen's. He recognises that part of his irritation with the beautiful speaker in the blue dress arises from his own attraction to her: "because there was something base in him, half innate and half the abrasion his present circumstances had rubbed on his soul, which was willing to go on this stupid sexual journey suggested by such vain, passive women and the saner part of him was vexed at this compliance; he thought he had a real case against her" (*J*, p. 61). He does not see, however, the irony of his overall view of women:

> They were the clumsiest of biological devices, and as they handed on life they spoiled it. They stood at the edge of the primeval swamps and called the men down from the highlands of civilisation and certain cells determined upon immortality betrayed their victims to them. They served the seed of life, but to all the divine accretions that had gathered round it, the courage that adventures, the intellect that creates, the soul that questions how it came, they were hostile (*J*, p. 71).

Richard's view, revealed in a scene where women are trying to speak out against such definitions, is deterministic and mysogynistic.[43] His perception of women is couched in the language of determinism, derived from several competing and complementary narratives - - those of Darwinian evolution, Freudian analysis and the Genesis myth. The narrative of biological determinism, included early in Part One of *The Judge,* sets up one of several counter-narratives to the suffrage plot, which become prominent in Part Two of the novel. Significantly, Richard's impatient outburst immediately precedes his recognition of Ellen's fundamental innocence. This innocence represents a blank space, a gap or omission through which "The Sentinel" and *Adela* as the textual origins and "textual unconscious"[44] of Part One of *The Judge* may be read. In addition, it becomes a metaphor for origin and interrogative space through which questions about sexual difference may be explored.

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[43]Peter Wolfe suggests that "The main target of the book's satire is Richard Yaverland. Yaverland's penchant for travel, his obsession with sex, his stern self-criticism, his strong mother, and his hatred for a father he hideously comes to resemble - these traits make him a present-day St. Augustine. Except for surrounding social conditions, Yaverland and the St. Augustine of Rebecca West's biography are practically one" (Wolfe, p. 37).

[44]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 149.

Innocence and Origin

> The imaginary garden of the Genesis story provides not only an account of a fall from innocence and grace into experience (or knowledge) and mortality but, no less important, a complex paradigm for the relationship between sexual difference and cultural creativity. The opening chapters of Genesis figure an appropriation of maternal creativity - of the powers of the womb - to male authority, both divine and human, creating an economy in which the female power of birth is counter balanced by male authority over human history and culture.[45]

Like Woolf's *Voyage Out*, *The Judge* is partly an attempt to interrogate, resist and rewrite Genesis. Ellen's innocence is prelapsarian, and her double and opposite, Marion Yaverland represents on one level, the fallen Eve. Richard Yaverland's first entry into the narrative introduces images of Eden, both prefiguring "the fall" and setting in motion a series of mythic and archetypal resonances. Richard appears in the narrative at the moment when Mr Philip is contemplating the seduction, if not rape, of Ellen Melville. Although Richard rescues her from a fate she is unaware of, his hands "patterned like a snake's belly" (*J*, p. 28)[46] suggest that he is an equally dangerous presence.[47] Significantly too, the image of Richard as serpent is juxtaposed with his representation as Adam. This is hinted at in his scorn for Ellen's name: "Ellen Melville was a ridiculous name for one of the most beautiful people who have ever lived. It was like climbing to a towered castle on a high eagle-haunted cliff and finding that it was called 'Seaview'" (*J*, p. 49). In Genesis, Adam is given the task of naming all the animals and naming Eve, thereby constituting his authority and Eve's subordination.[48] Richard's irritation at Ellen's name is perhaps not only because it seems

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[45]Christine Froula, "Rewriting Genesis", p. 199.

[46]Peter Wolfe briefly discusses the image of the "snake's belly" and "primordial necessity" (Wolfe, p. 37).

[47]Once again the parallels between *The Judge* and *The Voyage Out* are striking. Before Rachel and Terence set off into the jungle, Hirst warns them to beware of snakes. The South American setting, particularly at the mouth of the Amazon, "a symbolic site evoking a desired female/maternal origin and history" (Froula, "Rewriting Genesis", p. 212) is recalled, perhaps deliberately, through Richard's recent return from Rio de Janeiro.

[48]Froula, "Rewriting Genesis", p. 200.

cliched, but also because it suggests an identity and autonomy at odds with his desire.[49] Richard's Adamic association is made even clearer at the end of Part One of *The Judge*: as Ellen and Richard leave the hospital in which Ellen's mother has died, the narrative takes on a more dramatic tenor, with references to terror, "the plot of the universe", the "creative Person" held responsible for life, and Fate, who has "finally closed the story of Mrs Melville's life" (*J*, p. 197). Richard and Ellen are described as passing out through the iron gates into a grim landscape, "silent and hand in hand, grieving because she had lived without glory, she who was so much loved by them, whose life was going to be so glorious" (*J*, p. 197). The pair are figured here as Adam and Eve, cast out to re-enact the primitive drama of male and female relationships.[50] Figuring Richard as both serpent and Adam offers interesting alternative interpretations of the Genesis myth, where the serpent, that is sexuality itself, is associated with Adam rather than Eve. This reversal enacts late nineteenth-century feminist attempts

> to construct a feminist epistemology for the understanding of women's subordination and the means for its eradication. In contrast to the dominant representation of woman as 'Other'and equivalent to uncivilized 'savages', feminists constructed man, in his sexual 'excessiveness', as the *real* 'primitive' 'Other', lacking the true mark of civilization (self-control). In this obvious case of what Michel Foucault calls a 'reverse discourse', feminists subverted the notion of Eve's role in original sin by replacing it with a narrative in which man was the initial trangressor.[51]

Ellen's figuration as Eve aligns her both with innocence and also with the Fall and it is through her archetypal innocence that West continues her analysis of sexual difference and its consequences, begun in "The World's Worst Failure" series. Ellen's "fall" is enacted

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[49]In Richard's criticism of Ellen's name, West voices a distaste for her own name, the feminine and gentle sounding Cicely Fairfield.

[50]Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* ends with a similar image of primitive drama: "Alone, enmity was bared; also love ... It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke" (London: Grafton, 1987, pp. 158-159).

[51]Lucy Bland, *Banishing The Beast: English Feminism & Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 304.

through her lessons in becoming 'feminine', in becoming an object of desire. By tracing Ellen's "fall" into femininity, that is womanhood, West foregrounds the different constructions, social, mythical and biological, underlying this sexual difference.

In a letter to S.K. Ratcliffe, West describes the thesis of her novel as "the external swatting of that fly youth and beauty by the accumulations of evil done by careless handling of beautiful things" (Yale Archive). Ellen's innocence is intrinsically linked to her beauty, her physical presence upon which various men gaze, constructing their own versions of Ellen Melville. As Anne Norton notes:

> In several of [West's] novels, a woman's loveliness works as a road to her entrapment in an erroneous life; the possession of feminine beauty can mean a tragic destiny, even for characters who seem to shun expected ways of emphasizing and exploiting personal attractiveness. The problem, as West sees it, is not only that beauty incites male desire and so invites male betrayal, but that the web of myths surrounding beautiful women is too strong for (some) individuals to escape.[52]

Richard's first response to Ellen's beauty is to see her in terms of her physicality and determined by it, predicting from their earliest acquaintance her tragic destiny: "he knew it was a tragedy that such a face should surmount such a body. For her body would imprison her in soft places: she would be allowed no adventures other than love, no achievements other than births" (*J*, p. 32). Mr Mactavish James, Ellen's employer, sees her in similar terms: "But a face as bonnie as hers brings its troubles with it" (*J*, p. 165). Ironically, both Richard and Mactavish James teach Ellen to see herself through their eyes, through a masculine perspective. As Surma points out, Ellen "looks at herself being looked at from another's desire".[53] Mr James reveals Ellen's beauty to her by making her look in a mirror, in a scene that recalls that of the Frenchwoman in "The World's Worst Failure": "She looked obliquely at her reflection and ran her hands ashamedly up and down her body, and tried for

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[52]Norton, p. 299.
[53]Surma, p. 202.

a word and failed" (*J*, p. 148). The scene is explicitly one of transformation from naïvety, even androgyny, to femininity. Ellen's laughter changes, "as if she had been changed from gold to silver" and she develops a "delicate shrill chatter, glowing and holding herself with a fine frivolity that made it seem almost as if she were clad in silk, and passing from flowerlike loveliness to loveliness" (*J*, p. 149).[54] Her posturing in front of the mirror is the beginning of a performance which she begins to rehearse again and again as the narrative progresses. In Part Two Ellen catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror at Yaverland's End, and in response to her memory of Richard's desire, she begins putting on her hat and coat with "peacocking gestures and recklessly light-minded glances in the mirror" (*J*, p. 248). By becoming aware of male desire, Ellen begins to conform to those desires, and her own desires and identity become masquerades for her lover. She acknowledges her performance of the feminine towards the end of the novel when she tries to persuade Richard that she should accompany him on his search for Marion, who has disappeared, and in fact has committed suicide:[55] "Only a second or two ago she had betrayed her sex by pretending to be frightened by assuming one of the base qualities which tradition lyingly ascribed to women, because she had to be in his presence no matter at what price. There is no knowing where all this would end" (*J*, p. 405). Where it ends is with a repetition of the performance of the feminine when Roger aims sexual insults at Ellen and Richard. Remembering her mother's neglect and poverty, Ellen realises: "That was what happened to some who allowed themselves to be disregarded; who allowed any other than themselves to dwell in their men's attention" (*J*, p. 426). As several critics have pointed out, Ellen's newly acquired feminine role contributes

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[54]The imagery in this passage resembles that used in "The World's Worst Failure".

[55]As Lyn Pykett has pointed out, there are some interesting similarities between the New Woman novel, *The Woman who Did,* by Grant Allen (London: John Lane, 1895) and *The Judge*. The earlier novel also ends with a mother's suicide years after defying social convention and giving birth to an illegitimate child, although here it is implied that defying convention can only lead to disaster.

to the disastrous ending; she draws attention to Roger's insults, Richard murders his half-brother. Ellen *learns* sexual difference and is forced to behave according to its definitions.[56] In a similar reading of this scene, Norton notes: "Ellen learns her lesson - that as a beautiful woman she must stay desirable in order to keep her man - all too well ... because Richard has taught her to be vain and dependent, she destroys them both".[57] Thus Ellen is idealised and feminised; she is also demonised.

Mr Philip James's desire for Ellen reveals another way in which women are constructed and Ellen learns a different lesson about the "uses" of sexual difference. Instead of "falling" into femininity, Ellen becomes its correlative for Philip James, the fallen Eve, the carnal, the prostitute. Seeing Ellen with Yaverland and recalling his own recent and sordid encounter with a prostitute, he casts her in the very same role, blaming her for his uncontrolled lust: "But all these women were vile. There was no measure to the vileness that Ellen had brought on him. For it was all her fault, since he never would have gone with that woman in London if it had not been for the way she had carried on the evening before" (*J*, p. 126). If Philip James cannot see Ellen as pure and sexless, then she must be seen as vile. As Lucy Bland points out: "Behind the veneer of the dominant nineteenth-century ideal woman - the domestic 'angel in the house' - lurked the earlier representation of sexualized femininity: the Magdalene behind the Madonna".[58] In making these analogies, West highlights the iniquities of a society that maintained an ideal of purity and innocence in one set of women, through the existence of another set who were their opposite. This is made explicit in *The Judge* when Philip James reflects that "It had been his belief that the advantage of prostitution was that it gave one command over women like Ellen without

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[56]See Christine Froula's "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy" (*Critical Enquiry* December 1983, pp. 321-347) for a useful analysis of learned femininity.

[57]Norton, p. 306.

[58]Bland, p. 58.

bringing on one the trouble that would certainly follow if one did ill to Ellen" (*J*, p. 126). Ellen's innocence, her "protected" position thus endangers other women, and ultimately herself. Mr Philip James's reflections reveal once again the integral links between the law, the brothel and "femininity".

Significantly, the reflection cast over Ellen by the predatory desires of Philip James is repeated later in the novel, when Ellen and Richard quarrel about the date of their marriage. In the midst of the quarrel, Ellen suddenly recalls Philip James and realises: "That man hated her and this one loved her, but the difference in their aspects was not so great as she would have hoped" (*J*, p. 367). This recognition prompts a vivid memory of a street in Edinburgh, where a drunken man and woman squabble violently and then embrace violently, evocative of a grotesque archetype of relations between the sexes. The degraded state and status of the woman whose rejection of the man and then submission to his embraces, presents to Ellen a terrifyingly distorted image of her own position. As Judith Walkowitz points out, for some late Victorian and early-twentieth century feminists: "Prostitution ... served as a paradigm for the female condition; it established the archetypal relationship between men and women, repeated in perhaps a more veiled and subtle manner within the confines of genteel society".[59] It is a viewpoint which West both employs and interrogates in "The Sentinel", and in the "World's Worst Failure" series, and which she reconsiders in *The Judge*.

Although Ellen is accused of lacking modesty by the piqued Philip James,[60] and ironically accused of unchastity by Richard's half-brother Roger,[61] it is Marion who

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[59]Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 125.

[60]"While men had will-power to restrain their sexual desire, women had the essentially 'feminine' quality of modesty - the 'womanly propriety of behaviour'" (Bland, pp. 56-57).

[61]Roger sees Richard and Ellen through the large window of Ellen's room and assumes they are lovers. It is Roger's accusation that leads Richard to murder him. Although the scene of the murder is excessively melodramatic and ultimately an aesthetic failure, it is significant that it springs from the novel's preoccupation with chastity and impurity.

represents and challenges most fully the converse of primal innocence in the ideology of the fallen woman. As Lisa Tickner points out, even amongst the feminists' attempts to undermine the stereotypical way in which women were defined, they too could not avoid this dichotomy:

> Suffrage propaganda - because of its inheritance from earlier campaigns, is a critique of private and institutional male power, and the needs of the cause to which it was addressed - reaffirmed a particular representation of illicit sexuality as subject to the cleansing crusade of the womanly woman. This in turn confirmed the divide at the very heart of Victorian bourgeois sexual ideology between the chaste and the "fallen" woman.[62]

The name Marion is a variant of Mary, whose name includes the two extremes of the Virgin Mary and also that of the fallen woman, Mary Magdalene. As an unmarried mother, Marion is cast as a Magdalene, symbolically stoned by the village boys while she is pregnant, ostracised by society and abandoned by her lover.[63] Marion is portrayed as a victim, both of male desire[64] and of social prejudice. The nature of this prejudice is neatly dissected as Marion muses about the role her family played in forcing her to marry Peacy, who later rapes her. "The worst of illicit relationships is the provocation they give to the minds that hear of them. When it is said of a man and woman that they are married, the imagination sees the public ceremony before the altar, the shared house, the children, and all the sober external results of marriage; but when it is said of a man and woman that they are lovers, the imagination is confronted with the fact of their love" (*J*, p. 226). Once again West criticises the self-deceptions behind which society operates, suggesting that lovers out of wedlock are

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[62]Tickner, p. 222.

[63]In a review for the *New Statesman*, West draws a very interesting analogy between the prostitute and the mother: "The battle between the courtesan and the mother accounts for remarkably little in the world's history; generally speaking, both alike have been the victims of a society which through enormously preoccupied with sex makes only the most casual provision for those who exist to serve sexual needs" (*New Statesman* March 4, 1922, p. 18).

[64]West makes the theme of female victimization explicit in a letter to S.K. Ratcliffe: "I have come to the conclusion that *The Judge* must be a very bad book as no one sees its thesis - the way the pleasant vices of Harry pile up into this tragedy which involves the innocent Ellen" (Yale, n.d.).

punished for an activity that the marriage ceremony disguises. The overt confrontation of female sexuality and its ideological association with corruption, even evil, is what West foregrounds and what she tries to refigure. Like Hardy in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, a novel on which *The Judge* is obviously modelled, West tries to counter traditional viewpoints with an alternative. Alongside the narratives of victimhood and the fallen woman, West offers an evocative celebration of pregnancy and motherhood, and an alternative view of sexuality.[65] Showing Ellen the countryside in which she lives, Marion emblematizes the moment of origin:

> Again the place seemed curiously like Marion. It might well have been that to make her a god had modelled a figure in this estuary mud and breathed on it, so much, in her sallow colouring and the heavy impassivity which was the equivalent of the plain's monotony, did she partake of its qualities (*J*, p. 282).

Marion's identification with the landscape is not biblical, however, but pagan. When she first shows Ellen around Yaverland's End and its surrounds, she describes an old grass road as "[O]lder than Stonehenge" (*J*, p. 233) and she recalls "the last great wizard in England" who lived on a nearby island when she was a child. As Ellen acknowledges, this landscape "was a mental state, a revisitable peace, a country on whose soil the people and passions of imagination lived more intensely than on other earth" (*J*, p. 245), and Marion in some ways embodies its pagan history. Her love affair is conducted in a temple which Ellen rediscovers: "There was something religious about the scene. Rites of some true form of worship might fitly be celebrated here" (*J*, p. 410). Significantly, too, Marion's first acquaintance with Harry Yaverland and her first encounter with him as a lover is associated with hawthorn trees: "A year later they had stood once more under that hawthorn tree, and again he had

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[65]Kime Scott suggests that Marion's "recollection of nursing Richard at the breast is as stunning in its celebration of maternal passion as the much-discussed sexuality in the novels of Lawrence and Joyce" (*Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 2, p. 134).

shaken the may blossom down on her" (*J*, p. 257).[66] As Marina Warner notes, the cult of Flora, the Roman goddess of the harvest and of fruitfulness "was particularly associated with the heady flower of the hawthorn tree - may blossom".[67] Marion's love affair is thus celebrated and given value through its alignment with a different form of religion. Like Hardy's challenge to the equation between purity and chastity in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, these regenerative associations offer an alternative, celebratory reading of Marion's love affair, pregnancy and motherhood. They are overshadowed, however, by Marion's Hardyesque belief in, even identification with, a malign and predetermined destiny. "There was somewhere in the dark conspiring ether that wraps the world an intention to destroy her for her presumption in being Richard's mother and him for daring to be Richard - an intention that was vindictive against beauty and yet was fettered by a harsh quality resembling justice" (*J*, p. 329). Juxtaposed with this pagan narrative of determinism is one of "an almost Calvinistic awareness of predestination. A sense of the past, of the powerful unspoken influences that affect our lives, broods over the story, shaping and inhibiting the characters".[68] West's sense of the power of the past over the present lay also in her engagement with various scientific theories of the day which offered their own forms of determinism.

Darwin and Freud: Stories of Origins

> "It was as if this was the primeval ooze from which the first life stirred and crawled landwards to begin to make this a memorable star" (*J*, p. 232).
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> "humanity is trying, through art and science and discussion of the same, to

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[66]As several critics have illustrated, the temple and the hawthorn tree are important recurring images in West's writing, associated with passion and sexuality. See *The Return of the Soldier* (p. 102).

[67]Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Picador, 1985), p. 282. See also Sue Thomas's discussion of the affair between Harry and Marion. She also describes "may blossom's role in primal, carnivalesque celebration of fertility in rites of spring" (Thomas, p. 99).

[68]Hammond, p. 126.

gain comprehension of reality".[69]

West's interest in scientific discourses in relation to aesthetics and especially to feminist theory is evident from her earliest writing,[70] and her friendship with H.G. Wells stimulated and encouraged this interest. As Maggie Humm has noted, H.G. Wells's use of scientific language is often discernible in West's terminology.[71] Adela's invocation of Huxley and criticism of Herbert Spencer in "The Sentinel" anticipates Ellen's reading of Darwin and Huxley in *The Judge* (Richard introduces Ellen to Huxley's essays, p. 390); through both heroines West reflects her own history of reading and interpreting scientific theory. Engaging first with the legacy of Darwinian and Spencerian theories about women as they appeared in the writing of contemporary "scientific" thinkers on the subject (ranging from Sir Almroth Wright to Havelock Ellis) in her earliest reviews, West was soon writing and commenting on the new science or, more specifically the new psychology and Freud. (See Chapters 4 and 5). In several reviews for *Time and Tide* and *The New Statesman* during the early 1920s, West contemplated both the effects of the Darwinian legacy and the 'new psychology' on fiction and drama.[72] Wary of the excessive focus on the laws of heredity to explain human behaviour, especially in fiction, West criticized late nineteenth-century writers who worked within the naturalist or behaviourist tradition. This is made clear in a critical review of Zola: "That preposterous belief that strains in human beings are as identifiable as strains in sweet-peas, and can be blended with predictable results was excusable in Zola, since he was a half-educated man who had read too avidly in the scientific literature of an age

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[69]Rebecca West, "A Jixless Errand", *Time and Tide*, March 15, 1929.

[70]West's interest in the relations between art and science emerge most fully in the twenties through her associations with the scientific humanist journal, "The Realist" and in her long essay, "The Strange Necessity" in *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* (1928) (London: Virago, 1987).

[71]Humm, p. 171.

[72]In a theatre review for *Time and Tide*, West describes the play "M'Lady" as behaviourist ("M'Lady", *Time and Tide* July 29, 1921, p. 722).

which was as adventurous in biology as this age is in psychology".[73] At the same time, West was equally critical of writers who succumbed entirely to popularized Freudian theories in their writing.

Numerous critics have commented on the impact of Freudian theory on British thinkers and writers, especially during the twenties. As Maroula Joannou points out: "there was a vogue for psychoanalytic ideas after more of Freud's works, available since 1913, came to be translated in the 1920s".[74] West's own engagement with Freud's work, already evident in some of her earliest reviews and her 1918 novel about shell shock (see Chapter 5), emerges even more strongly in her discussions of psychological and "naturalistic" fiction in the reviews for the *New Statesman* during the early twenties, reflecting not only her own interests but a general preoccupation of writers with what West refers to as "the new psychology". In a 1922 review, West considers two novels, one of which relies too much on "the superficies of life" while the other is excessively preoccupied with the new psychology, where the characters "are too often mere types of desire, unincarnated souls". In her analysis West indicates that the ideal is midway between the two methods, where one should use "the eyes of the flesh".[75] In criticising with equal virulence both the realist school of writing, and fiction relying too heavily on "the new psychology", West reflects her own struggle with these very methods in her writing, turning her criticism into a kind of self-instruction or manifesto for the writer.[76]

The struggle to balance these discourses as an aesthetic can also be seen as a struggle to define sexual difference. In *The Judge*, this struggle is enacted both as theme and

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[73]*New Statesman*, February 4, 1922, p. 18.

[74]Maroula Joannou, *'Ladies Please Don't Smash These Windows': Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change 1918-38* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), p. 81.

[75]*New Statesman* February 18, 1922, pp. 564, 566.

[76]Virginia Woolf was even more uneasy about the impact of Freudian ideas on fiction. See her "Freudian Fiction" (1920) and Elizabeth Abel's *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

metaphor. It is also enacted as a struggle of discourses, where the differing 'scientific' and mythic narratives are deliberately foregrounded, even staged as narrative. "During the past hundred years or so evolutionary theory has functioned in our culture like a myth in a period of belief, moving effortlessly to and fro between metaphor and paradigm, feeding an extraordinary range of disciplines beyond its own original biological field".[77] This Darwinian legacy, functioning as myth, metaphor and feminist discourse in West's earliest writing, forms an important narrative thread in *The Judge*. In "Scarlet Berries" *(*1916), West had written a metaphorical narrative exploring the evolution of "femininity" (see Chapter 6). The Darwinian narrative thread in *The Judge* is an extension of this brief analysis of evolutionary "origins", as well as an engagement with contemporary writing on this and other related subjects.

H.G. Wells's *Outline of History,* begun in 1918 and published in 1920, is one such text which West drew on while criticising its premises. Sub-titled "A plain history of life and mankind", the *Outline of History* was "a survey of human history from the earliest dawn of civilisation to the world war".[78] This work was described by one contemporary as prompted by "an unconscious need to provide an alternative to the Bible, retelling the story of mankind in secular terms. Now he satisfied that need with an epic that began with the Creation and ended with a vision of the New Jerusalem".[79] West "resented the amount of time and energy he spent on writing non-fiction - in her view a waste of his talents",[80] but in *The Judge* she also drew on and rewrote Wells's grand historical sweep into a personal history, in which evolutionary progress and process are questioned. Through the Darwinian and Edenic

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[77]Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, (London: Ark, 1983), p. 17.
[78]Hammond, p. 118.
[79]Qtd in Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, *The Life of H.G. Wells: The Time Traveller*, p. 323.
[80]Hammond, p. 120.

metaphors in the novel, West also returns to the dawn of civilisation, ending symbolically with violence and murder, in a fictional setting just prior to the First World War. Richard Yaverland's involvement with the manufacture of explosives anticipates the war and emblematises the male archetype of the warrior, in opposition to Ellen's archetypal role as mother at the end of the novel. Far from the New Jerusalem envisaged at the end of Wells's book, West's representation of Richard and Ellen seems to embody a sense of evolutionary repetition which she describes in "Scarlet Berries" (See Chapter 6).

May Sinclair was another writer whose interpretation of Darwinian theory may have influenced West. Sinclair's *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919) was particularly important for its preoccupation with the laws of heredity and the ambiguous figure of the mother. Jean Radford notes:

> The treatment of heredity in the Olivier family bears all the traces of nineteenth-century determinist thinking, while the process of the heroine's self-development is fashioned as much in terms of Plato as of Freud. One of the fascinations of *Mary Olivier* is that so many different coloured ideological threads are woven together. In this respect, its very unevenness re-enacts something of the crisis in social and intellectual life taking place at the end of the First World War.[81]

West reviewed several of Sinclair's novels for the *New Statesman* and she admired *Mary Olivier*, observing that this novel "showed Miss Richardson what could be done with her own method".[82] Sinclair's preoccupation with the detrimental effects of inherited characteristics in the Olivier family, which include weak hearts and an addiction to alcohol, is a minor preoccupation in *The Judge*; the story of Peacy and his ill-begotten son, Roger, is influenced by it. As a victim of Peacy's lust and hatred, Marion wonders "what blood she had perpetuated" (*J*, p. 305) in giving birth to Roger. The story of the William Yaverland who built a large window to keep jealous watch over his wife, makes Ellen think that there is

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[81]May Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, ed. and intro., Jean Radford (London: Virago, 1980).
[82]*New Statesman* October 16, 1920, p. 16.

something dangerous about the family: "Since that person had been kin to this woman who was dark with unspent energy, she figured him as being not quite extinguished by death and therefore a tenant of the apartment. The jealousy of one of his stock would probably have more dynamic power than her most exalted passions" (*J*, p. 238). In Roger's degeneracy, his physical and mental weakness, "West invokes genetically regressive physical characteristics popularised by Social Darwinism to promote her own brand of cultural revitalization".[83] Richard's strength and beauty is "[B]ecause vitality itself had been kneaded into his flesh by his parents' passion" (*J*, p. 309). These eugenic patterns provide a context for West's novel that link her with writers such as Wells, Sinclair and D.H. Lawrence, some of whom may have been sources of information as well as influences.[84]

Perhaps most important in West's deployment of adaptations of Darwinian narratives is the issue of determinism and plot. As Gillian Beer notes: "Before determinism, necessity required, or Fate struck. In the idea of Fate the apparent autonomy of the human being is interrupted by Fate's interventions and the individual proves to be part of a plot not of his own making. But Fate's interventions are selective, determinism is all-inclusive. In determinism autonomy is extinguished and the consciousness of freedom rests chiefly upon an oblivion of the antecedents to our choice".[85] In *The Judge*, Darwinian narratives are entangled with pagan and biblical myth, as well as with melodramatic invocations of Fate and Destiny.[86] While the Genesis myth is both evoked and challenged in a variety of ways

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[83]Peterson, "The Emancipation of the Heroine", p. 193.

[84]West's use of contemporary eugenic discourses can be traced throughout her early writing career, but she never subscribed explicitly to eugenic beliefs or practices. She was particularly outspoken and critical of supporters of eugenics during the twenties. See, for example, "Rebecca West says that Environment Matters Most", (*The Daily Express*, June 8, 1928) and "Rebecca West to Dean Inge" (*The Daily Express*, November 21, 1927).

[85]Beer, "Beyond Determinism", p. 81.

[86]West, who admired D.H. Lawrence's writing, may have been influenced by his use of Darwinian and Edenic myth in *The Rainbow* (1915). As Michael Bell points out: "Lawrence's double myth of origins combines the ascending Darwinian evolution from the marsh with a fall from Eden. The struggle between these two principles, and the struggle to prevent them falling apart, is the living myth of *The Rainbow*". (Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*: *Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge:

in the novel, West also questions narratives of biological determinism, although with less confidence, in which female youth, innocence and beauty are bound to become sexual sacrifice and motherhood, and where heterosexual love itself becomes a form of determinism. The conflation of and conflict between myth as religious dogma and the scientific narrative is made explicit, even dramatized, towards the end of the novel when Ellen criticises Roger's religious faith: "'But the Bible isn't final. There's lots of things we know more about than the people who wrote it. Look at all yon nonsense they put in about Adam and Eve because they didn't know about evolution. That alone shows it's absurd to rely solely on the Bible...'" (*J*, p. 389). Thinking of "the truths that men like Darwin and Huxley had worked all their lives to discover, and faced the common hatred to proclaim" (*J*, p. 389), Ellen's rejection of one form of predetermination by citing what might be another is ironic, foregrounding again the double bind in which feminists trying to redefine womanhood found themselves.

By invoking a reading of the Darwinian narrative, Ellen introduces a plot which differs from but also parallels that of the Genesis myth. As Beer points out: "Plot insists on origins, sequence, consequences, discovery, exclusion and closure".[87] The metaphors of primordial origin in the novel both perform and set in motion deterministic narratives. Significantly, potential new beginnings in the novel end in repetitions of old stories. For example, Richard and Ellen's imagined future life together with which Part One ends figures a new beginning, (although that new beginning is represented metaphorically as the Fall). What happens in Part Two is in fact a rehearsal of an old plot, in which Ellen begins to follow in the footsteps of her mother and, more literally, of Marion. In Part Two, Marion gives Ellen her old room to sleep in; it has been spruced up, "So you have a fresh start" (*J*, p. 235). The fresh start, symbolised by the primordial setting of the Essex marshes, is not

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Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 116).

[87]Beer, "Beyond Determinism", p. 94.

fresh at all. As Kime Scott notes: "While she resists identification with Marion Yaverland and her native Essex landscape, Ellen uncannily positions herself where Marion was as a young lover, recycling the past".[88] Climbing Roothing Castle, Ellen chooses to rest in the same place as Marion: "The girl was standing on the very top of the grassy mound that supported the tower, her back resting against the wall, her feet on a shelf that had formed where the earth had been washed away from the masonry foundations by the dripping from a ledge above. It was the very place where Marion had been standing ever so long ago at the moment where Richard had first moved within her" (*J*, p. 259). In the same way, Ellen's desire to stand statue-like in a niche in the temple in which Marion and Harry were lovers, suggests another repetition (*J*, p. 409). Ellen's acceptance of single motherhood and abandonment by Richard fulfils the predictions of the old stories. Her very femaleness, innocence and beauty seem to deny Ellen the possibility of a fresh start. West exposes the determining myths that make Ellen a victim of her innocence and beauty, but the scientific narratives are more difficult to resist. In Darwinian terms, "sexual selection will always emphasise the predominance of beauty over other characteristics".[89] Thus, Ellen's identity is conditioned and predetermined not only by myth but by the belief in a biological blueprint mankind has not yet progressed beyond. The fear that biology might mean destiny was reinforced by the narratives of Freudian psychoanalysis, as Kingsley Kent notes:

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[88]"*Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 2, p. 136. Kime Scott reads these repetitions in a more optimistic light, seeing Ellen as a sibyl, "capable of a timeless wisdom" (p. 136) and capable, perhaps, of reversing the negativities embodied by her own mother and by Marion.

[89]Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 85. Significantly, West's preoccupation with feminine beauty and her interpretation of its place in the Darwinian scheme of things is echoed in non-fiction texts she wrote during the same period. Marie Stopes is particularly interesting in this context. In a book published in 1920, she declares: "The century long working of economic laws based on physical force, the remnants of which still affect us, has resulted in man generally having the selective power and tending to choose for his wife the most beautiful or charming woman that his means allow; hence hitherto on the whole, the race has been bred from the better and more beautiful women" (*Radiant Motherhood: A Book for Those Who are Creating the Future*, rpt in *The Mothers: Controversies of Motherhood*, in Marie Mulvey Roberts and Tamue Mizuta, eds., London: Routledge, 1994, p. 13). Here women's beauty is not only described in Darwinian terms, but within a eugenic framework, popular during this period.

> With the popularization of Freudian theory in the 1920s, separated sphere ideology based on constructions of masculinity and femininity and male and female sexuality received additional scientific justification. Psychoanalysis filtered into Britain through the lens of biology. Whereas Freud had posited a psychological bisexuality in males and females, and asserted that masculinity and femininity and sexuality were cultural phenomena that required explanation, British psychiatrists and sexologists put forward theories of sexuality and sexual difference that stemmed from biology.[90]

There were direct links, however, between Freudian analysis and biology, specifically the biology arising from Darwin's theories. As Sulloway points out, "it was Darwin who handed Freud the most powerful instrument - namely evolutionary theory's stress upon the dynamic, the instinctual, and, above all, the *nonrational* in human behaviour".[91] For both thinkers, the key to the present lay in the past.[92] *Totem and Taboo*, translated and published in 1918, "was a pivotal text in the dissemination of psychoanalytic theory in England. A wide range of nonspecialist readers were attracted to Freud's bold account of social evolution".[93] The account of social evolution which emerges in an early version of Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex, was rooted in anthropology and Darwinian theory.[94]

Critics hostile to West's absorption of Freudian analysis into her writing, particularly into *The Judge*, have focused their criticism on her use of the Oedipus Complex.[95] In response to contemporary reviews of the novel, West protested vigorously at the labelling of *The Judge* as a novel about the Oedipus Complex. In a letter to S.K. Ratcliffe, she declares,

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[90]Kingsley Kent, "Gender Reconstruction After the First World War", p. 73.

[91]Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (London: Burnett Books, 1979), p. 276.

[92]Sulloway, p. 257.

[93]Abel, p. 27.

[94]See Abel for more details (pp. 21-29).

[95]At the time of its publication, *The Judge* was described by some antagonistic critics as a Freudian case history, for its literal use of "the new psychology". Jane Marcus, who cites some of these critics, also points out that: "Five decades have not changed British attitudes toward Freudian thought very much. But Rebecca West was one of the first British intellectuals to recognize Freud's genius" (Introduction to *The Judge*, London: Virago, 1980 p. 7). Critics such as Peter Wolfe comment on the centrality of psychology in the novel and of "psychic inwardness", contributing to the "stream-of consciousness" technique. He links West with Freud, Ellis, Wells and Lawrence (*Sons and Lovers*). For him, the stylistic and psychoanalytic flights are made at the cost of the story (*Rebecca West, Artist and Thinker*, p. 35). Harold Orel is even less impressed, saying that the novel shows a "strained application of Freudian insights" (Orel, p. 70).

half-seriously, "I could beat the heads of all the people who talk about the Oedipus complex on a stone pavement - it is I suppose a graceful compliment to me on the part of Providence that to prove how right I am three men have committed suicide because of the death of their mothers since the book was published" (Yale Archive, n.d.). Her protest is, however, somewhat disingenuous. That West was reading Freud and writers drawing on Freudian narratives is evident in *The Judge*.[96] Discussing the novel in relation to Greek Tragedy, Marcus notes that: "As Freud returned to that landscape, that literature, to explain the psychology of sons and mothers, so Rebecca West makes the same leap in *The Judge*".[97] As well as the passionate relationship between Marion and Richard, Marion's overwhelming memories of the past that control and define her, and the central theme of motherhood owe something to current Freudian theories. What is interesting about these themes, which can loosely be described as Freudian, is the particular way in which West presents them in the novel.[98] The Darwinian narrative is made overt through images of the primordial and allusions to heredity and environment. In the same way, the distortions of excessive mother/son love and the power of past experience is performed in this novel, and self-

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[96]Lawrence and particularly Sinclair were also important influences on West through their engagement with Freudian theory. Writing about May Sinclair, Kime Scott suggests that "Her use of writing to resolve the findings of psychoanalysis, which came somewhat at Freud's suggestion" as a way of coping with "troubling childhood situations"(*Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 1, p. 59). West's interest in Freudian analysis intensified during the twenties. She underwent analysis in 1927 and there is evidence that she herself corresponded with Freud. (A postcard in the Yale Archive, signed by Freud, addressed to "Dear Madam" and alluding to his reading of "your St Augustine"). My thanks to Sarah Colvin and Dr. Ritchie Robertson for translating and transcribing this text.

[97]Marcus, Introduction to *The Judge*, p. 4.

[98]A detailed study of West's adaptations of Freud cannot be undertaken here. Recent feminist critics such as Sue Thomas and Loretta Stec have usefully addressed Freud's influence on West, drawing on psychoanalytic theory in their approaches. Thomas roots her argument in a sympathetic consideration of West's reading of Freud and her use of romance conventions: "West shaped her interrogations of romance conventions to explore, in particular, the "nature" of women and the neuroticism of men, using critically her reading in psychoanalysis" (Thomas, p. 95). Thomas's assertion that West was "no mere popularizer of Freud; her radical and innovative work with psychoanalytic theory has been overlooked by critics because it is not written in theoretical genres or the 'affiliative theoretical language of Western intellectual institutions'" (Thomas, p. 90), also provides a useful answer to critics who have condemned the Freudianism of West's novel. Loretta Stec's comments on the passivity of women in Freudian theory offers one possible approach to West's treatment of Freud's ideas in this novel (Stec, p. 81).

consciously presented as an alternative narrative through which to read human relations. This self-conscious presentation or performance is at its most obvious early in Part Two of the novel, when Marion articulates to herself what is, essentially, an Oedipal narrative. Soon after she meets Ellen, Marion mentions Richard's previous relationships with women, suggesting to Ellen that they were flawed and to herself, identifying the reasons for this flaw: "Why, because he loves me, his mother, so far beyond all reason! Because he thinks me perfect, the queen of all women who have brains and passions, and all other women who pretend to these things seem pretenders to my throne, on whom he can bestow no favour without suspicion of disloyalty to me" (*J*, p. 215). The melodrama of this utterance characterizes not only Marion in this section, but also those narratives associated with the "new psychology" of the novel.[99] Marion's memories of her past which make her sleepless and brooding are like waking dreams of the Freudian unconscious. These memories are first presented through Richard's consciousness, triggered off by his seeing his mother's handwriting on an envelope in Part One. The memories, which have invaded and shaped Richard's consciousness, are also presented in Gothic terms: "She was sitting at the table by the window playing patience, and she stared over her shoulder at him with tearless eyes. But all the windows were flung open to let out misery, and she had lit several candles as well as the electric light; and winged things that had risen from the marshes to visit this brightness died in those candle flames without intervention" (*J*, p. 88). West's use of the Gothic mode to evoke a past which ultimately determines the fate of both mother and son as well as of the innocent Ellen, is both powerful and perhaps ironic in its self-consciousness. In this aspect

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[99]As Peter Brooks makes clear, there is an important link between melodrama and Freudian analysis: "Psychoanalysis is a version of melodrama first of all in its conception of the nature of conflict, which is stark and unremitting, possibly disabling, menacing to the ego, which must find ways to reduce or discharge it. The dynamics of repression and the return of the repressed figure the plot of melodrama" (*The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 201).

of West's quest for the origins or sources of the distorted relations between the sexes, West also foregrounds the narratalogical element of her quest.

Both the Darwinian legacy and the theories emerging through the "new psychology", as they are utilised and foregrounded in the novel, are determining narratives. One of the most contradictory and indeed powerfully determining images in the novel is that of the mother. The state of motherhood was something with which both evolutionary and psychoanalytic theorists were particularly concerned. In asserting sexual difference, it was to motherhood that followers of Darwin referred as the natural evolutionary end of femaleness. Freud's reworking of the Oedipus complex led him to argue that "penis envy created in the female child a lifelong dissatisfaction with her identity as a woman. Her discomfiture could be overcome only through the substitution of the penis with a child. Happiness and health for women, in other words, depended upon motherhood".[100] West's consideration and dramatization of motherhood in the novel further interrogates these discourses.

As Anne Surma points out, the deterministic narrative structure of *The Judge* is set in motion by the extraordinary epigraph: "Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father".[101] Its language is biblical, recalling the Genesis myth West sought to rewrite. The epigraph enacts an important inversion of the myth, however, in which sin is assigned to the father/Adam and the power of judgement to the mother/Eve. In her analysis of the Genesis myth and the way in which it "exiles women from symbolic activity", Froula notes that "As the monotheistic father-god that it depicts separates light from darkness, so does that god separate the thinkable - the name and law of the father - from the unthinkable,

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[100]Kingsley Kent, "Gender Reconstruction", p. 73.
[101]Surma, p. 64.

what I will call the repressed and silenced name (or word) of the mother".[102] The silencing or erasure of the mother is what women writers like Virginia Woolf tried to resist, instead attempting to "expose and undo the myth's tyranny and, by recovering the buried mother, think the unthought world beyond the pale of masculine culture".[103] In her epigraph for *The Judge*, West symbolically resurrects the mother figure by setting her centre stage and granting her characteristics traditionally associated with male power. The conventional images of motherhood are thus problematised and rendered ambiguous, reflecting West's views from personal experience as well as from her response to the cult of motherhood central to post-war feminism. Through the metaphor of the mother, the quest for origins and meaning is centralised, both reinforcing and unsettling the web of determining narratives that constitute *The Judge*.

Rewriting Motherhood and Other Stories

Stanford Friedman, in formulating her theory of repressed and expressed desire revealed through an analysis of draft or serial texts, invokes the repressed mother as metaphor for women's narrative. Extracting her metaphor from Freud's theory of dreams, Friedman notes:

> As the dream's "navel", the unplumbable aporia of the dream-text for Freud is the point of contact with the maternal body, the irretrievable site of origins. Freud's metaphor for the gap or knot in the dream-text and the text of dream interpretation privileges woman - specifically the maternal - as origin of what is censored, what is disguised in the grammar of the dream-work. Ultimately, his figurative formulation suggests, the return of the repressed is the return of woman, of that mother/other, to him forever unknown, untranscribable, untranslatable.[104]

Applying a similar analysis in her examination of the development of Joyce's *Stephen Hero*

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[102]Froula, "Rewriting Genesis", p. 197.
[103]Froula, "Rewriting Genesis", p. 198.
[104]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed in Women's Narrative", p. 142.

into *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stanford Friedman traces the literal silencing of the mother in Joyce's texts, "the erasure of her subjectivity, and the creation of the m/other who exists for and in the discourse of the son who thereby takes his place in the symbolic order of the father".[105] Considering the way in which *Portrait* enacts the censorship of "the mother who knows and the lover who speaks" as they appear in *Stephen Hero*, Stanford Friedman suggests that this process of "repression of the mother, of woman as subject" is not only emblematic of Joyce's modernism, but of male modernism as a whole.[106]

The application of Stanford Friedman's analysis to *The Judge* and its "draft" texts, "The Sentinel" and *Adela*, reveals a process which is the very reverse of Joyce's, anticipating in this context, the emergence of a different "female modernist" form in West's writing. The preoccupation with the maternal and with origins was one West shared with many other contemporary women writers. As Clare Hanson points out:

> Women's writing of the period repeatedly turns back to the earliest period of life, as though to articulate a story of origins which would recognize the authority of the mother as well as the father. The 'mother/daughter' plot ..., thus becomes a key thematic and structural principle in modernist women's writing.[107]

In "The Sentinel", Adela Furnival is an orphan and familial influences and pressures are deflected onto relatives who represent views against which Adela positions herself. The absence of the mother in this highly autobiographical text is thus, in one sense, a liberating strategy. The presence of the mother in the text would perhaps have enforced some kind of censorship, not only on the activities of Adela Furnival, but also on the writer herself. Altering her own life story, West writes a story where there are no parents, only wealthy

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[105]"(Self)Censorship and the Making of Joyce's Modernism" in *Joyce: The Return of the Repressed*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 35.

[106]Stanford Friedman, "(Self)Censorship", p. 41.

[107]Clare Hanson, "Looking Within: Women's writing in the modernist period, 1910-40" in *An Introduction to Women's Writing from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, ed. Marion Shaw, (London: Prentice-Hall, 1998), p. 215.

relatives who provide an environment in which Adela can begin a career as a teacher and become a suffragette rebel. While the mother is absent, a preoccupation with motherhood as an ideology is reflected through the various versions of motherhood offered. The suffragettes Adela encounters become, in fact, alternative types of mothers, literally and figuratively, who take the place of the absent mother. In revising "The Sentinel" as *Adela*, West changed the orphan status of her heroine and described parents who were at once highly autobiographical and also caricatures of West's own family. Mrs Furnival is so downtrodden, both by her brother and by her husband, who has abandoned his wife and daughter to ignominious poverty, that she epitomizes archetypal feminine victimization.

The absent mother in "The Sentinel" is replaced by the gentle but down-trodden and pathetic Mrs Furnival in *Adela*. Mrs Furnival is neither central nor completely marginal in this fragment and traces of her remain in West's much more sympathetic portrait of Ellen's mother in *The Judge*. Mrs Melville is as fragile and as weakened by her harsh experiences at the hands of a feckless husband as Mrs Furnival has been, but Ellen's memories of their shared experiences and of her former beauty restore to her a strength and dignity her predecessor lacked.[108] The angry representations of the mother by the younger writer, either as absolute absence or as caricature, are redrawn with compassionate and identifying hindsight. In *The Judge*, motherhood becomes a central theme in the novel, initiated by the epigraph and followed through the variety of mothers and stories about mothers narrated. For example, Mrs Ormiston is a suffragette leader, inspirational speaker and "one of those tragically serious mothers in whose souls perpetual concern for their children dwelt like a

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[108]Sue Thomas, in her discussion of the mothers in *The Judge* suggests that: "The 'sin' of Ellen's and Richard's mothers was the excess passivity of gendered powerlessness. Subconsciously they justified a graceful submissiveness and passivity in the face of cruel betrayal on the strength of fantasies - romantic and sensual memories of passion" (Thomas, pp. 101-2). In her analysis of Ellen's relationship with her mother and Marion, Anne Norton sees a line of tragic repetition, in which Ellen, like Mrs Melville and Marion, is reduced "to an obsession with a man" (Norton, p. 306).

cloud" (*J*, p. 61), while Mrs Melville has had her vitality and loveliness crushed out of her through the death of her sons and the desertion of her husband. Stories are also told of a mother whose baby has died (*J*, p. 251), of unmarried mothers in general and of Roger's fiancée, who, Marion suggests, has recently had a child (*J*, p. 395), and most powerfully, of Marion Yaverland herself. These stories, especially those of Mrs Melville and Marion Yaverland, gradually replace the suffragette story, as Ellen loses her mother and becomes absorbed into Marion's story.

There is another "text" embedded in the various stories and ideas about motherhood which emerge through "The Sentinel" / *The Judge* narrative. This is the story of West's mother, Isabella Fairfield, which underlies the narrative of "The Sentinel" and which becomes more insistent in *The Judge,* as West merges her own story of motherhood with that of her mother. In "The Sentinel", West's mother's family background had provided one source for the plot. Adela's relatives are involved in manufacturing in the Manchester area, with particular interests in textiles and the lace industry. Isabella Fairfield's maternal grandfather was "a prosperous lace merchant" and Isabella's mother ended up managing a lace shop in Edinburgh.[109] The young Rebecca weaves a socialist and feminist narrative around a familial history, prompting commentary on sweated labour, poor payment of women and prostitution. She maintains the family background of the textile industry in *Adela*. Drawing on her mother's stories and on those of suffragette friends and acquaintances as a framework, West the novice writer, constructed a tale around an idealised heroine and

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[109]Glendinning, p. 13. Glendinning notes that: "When Cissie came to write up this story, (her family history) based on her recall of her mother's reminiscences, she emphasized the tragic predicament of her maternal grandmother, attributing the lace-shop to her courageous enterprise , and creating out of Jessie Campbell Mackenzie a brave unsupported provider like her own mother Isabella Fairfield in the next generation" (Glendinning, p. 14). West's reminiscences were published posthumously in *Family Memories*, written on and off "for the last two decades of her life" (Faith Evans, ed. *Family Memories*, p. 1). Anne Norton's reading of *Family Memories* in relation to *The Judge* ("Rebecca West's Ironic Heroine") prompted my own comparison.

a projected future self. In *The Judge*, the mother's stories and the story of the mother are even more evident in a narrative, which not only becomes a quest for the mother, but a quest for meaning in relation to West's own story of maternity. Through these layers of narrative, West dramatises the mythic, archetypal and social constructions of the mother. To adopt the language suggested by the title, West puts the ideology of motherhood on trial.

Significantly, West dedicated *The Judge* to her mother who died in 1921.[110] In Part One, the story of Mrs Melville is an adaptation and embellishment of the story of Isabella Fairfield, abandoned and widowed, reduced to abject poverty and finally death. In Part Two, West turns to the stories her mother had told her about her youth and the matriarchy which sustained yet also contributed to her later difficulties.[111] *Family Memories* tells a tale both of female resourcefulness and strength and of the sometimes detrimental power women wield over other women.[112] Isabella's mother and her Aunt Isa held the family together, but did so at times at the cost of Isabella's own future in *Family Memories*. After the death of her husband, Isabella's mother opened a lace shop which met with family disapproval. In defiance of the family, one of her sisters came to live with the family. "It is a beautiful drama of sisterly love, but unfortunately the heroine was badly cast. She was a hunchback, but that could not excuse her: ... Aunt Isa was eternally critical but made nonsense of criticism, for

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[110]Glendinning, p. 75.

[111]According to Evans in the introduction to *Family Memories*: "Both Rebecca West's parents were much given to the telling and retelling of familiar tales". Tracing the history of the stories in *Family Memories*, Evans notes the many sources, including "conversations between Rebecca West and her mother Isabella before her death in 1921" (Evans, p. 2). *Family Memories* can in fact be read as another layer in the "composite text" that is "The Sentinel"/*Judge* narrative. Written so many years later, *Family Memories* is a text in which West once more considers her family history in order to understand her personal history, and in doing so, fact and fiction do not always remain distinct. In drawing on this memoir as a source for Isabella Fairfield's story, which also emerges in fragmented forms in *The Judge*, it is important to bear in mind that neither text can be seen as providing absolute fact or absolute fiction. The slippages between biography, autobiography and fiction in West's writing offer a fascinating study awaiting attention.

[112]In *Mary Olivier*, May Sinclair criticised the distorting power of the mother, who had absorbed the Victorian ideology of womanhood, over the daughter. As Terry Philips points out: "Ultimately a woman's power, if she accepts the dominant gendered ideology of her society, can only be over other women" (Terry Philips, "Battling with the Angel: May Sinclair's powerful mothers" in Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham, eds., *Image and Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, London: Longman, 1996), p. 133.

with her the process never led to praise. There was no alternative but blame. No phenomenon could be analysed and valued; each and all were prisoners in the dock, and guilty".[113] Isabella, unmarried, without prospect of a real career because she is a woman, has her life shaped and reshaped by her mother and aunt. West writes of her mother's "blinding rage at this offhand disposal of her future", when she was sent away from home to be a musical governess,[114] and later, when Isabella was sent to Australia to trace her brother, West writes: "My grandmother then unfolded a plan which I find it shocking to contemplate: a quite reckless disposition of a young woman's life".[115] In both of these instances, however, West examines the forces shaping the older women's decisions about Isabella's future, highlighting the fact that the negative effects of female power can in turn be seen as a consequence of the mysogynist ideologies of patriarchal Victorian society.

In *The Judge*, a much earlier adaptation of Isabella's story emerges in the form of Marion's experiences of betrayal, not only by her lover, but also by her grandmother and aunt. Responding to the scandal of Marion's illegitimate pregnancy, her grandmother and Aunt Alphonsine propose that Marion should marry Peacy, her lover's butler. Following this act of coercion and conformity to society's norms, both aunt and grandmother collude in Peacy's rape of Marion.[116] As extreme versions of Isabella's mother and aunt, Marion's relatives, themselves governed by social conventions and distortions, perpetuate these through their treatment of Marion. The grandmother, who has been disappointed in marriage, has a "theory of the sanctity of marriage ... it comforted her to believe that by merely being a wife she had fulfilled a function pleasing to God and necessary to the existence of society"

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[113]*Family Memories*, p. 26.
[114]*Family Memories*, p. 109.
[115]*Family Memories*, p. 121.
[116]See Sue Thomas who also discusses the relations, "conditioned by a corrupt culture", between mothers and children in the novel. (Thomas, p. 99)

(*J*, p. 225). Aunt Alphonsine, disfigured by a burn on her face (like her real life counterpart, Aunt Isa, who was a hunchback), bitter, and dedicated "to the ridiculous god of decorum" (*J*, p. 226), is made "the most responsible for the defeat of Marion's life" (*J*, p. 225).[117] Following Peacy's rape, Marion gives birth to Roger, and it is his existence as much as Richard's, that brings destruction in such melodramatic fashion to Yaverland's End.

Thus, the various layers of narratives of motherhood, West's own autobiographical story of illegitimate maternity, her mother's stories, and pre and post-war feminist constructions of maternity, constitute the complex web that makes up *The Judge*. Through this very different version of "thinking back through our mothers" (see Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*), West examines maternal narratives and maternity itself as both a positive and negative source of connection and continuity.[118] The quest for the mother, like the theme of Ellen's innocence, is a quest for origins through which plot, outcome, even continuity and repetition might be explained and perhaps overcome. West's texts enact a rehearsal of maternal narratives, both as a search for sources and as an act of purgation. Exhuming the old narratives offers the possibility of writing new ones.

Claiming in a letter that the novel's true topic [is] the point where "the tide of the older woman's fate met the younger one's",[119] West's comment highlights the important doubling of mothers and daughters, particularly of Ellen and Marion as both a structural device[120] and as a powerful metaphor through which questions of origins, continuity and ultimately identity are explored. Significantly, the meeting point of the fates of the younger

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[117]Again, both the grandmother and Aunt Alphonsine are represented as victims as much as victimizers.

[118]As Evans points out, West had "a passion for genealogy" and "She never tired of looking into people's backgrounds as a means of comprehending their behaviour" (*Family Memories*, p. 7).

[119]Qtd. in Glendinning, p. 81.

[120]Surma suggests that the switch in focus in the novel from Ellen to Marion can be read "as a move to control the contradictions of female identity, and to allow the narrative as pattern to continue at all, by splitting the difference into two perspectives who are thereby enabled to externalise their contradictions, voice their unease, speak out of their silence" (Surma, pp. 189-190).

and older woman, figured through Ellen and Mrs Melville as well as through Ellen and Marion, is realised symbolically through the death of the mother figure. Mrs Melville's death opens out into the story of Marion Yaverland, passionate lover and mother, all-absorbed and absorbing. Her death on the marshes in turn anticipates, even prompts, Ellen's own induction into motherhood. Depicted by the end of the novel as a highly problematic natural process, this continuity disturbs the narrative and its readers alike.

Mothers and Daughters

Mrs Melville's death at the end of Part One is a scene of profound communication between mother and daughter at the moment of separation. The mother speaks only once, providing an extraordinary closure to Part One and its focus on feminist issues: "But Mrs Melville fought to say it. Something had struck her as so remarkable that she was willing to spend one of her last breaths commenting on it. They both bent forward eagerly to hear it. She whispered: 'Nice to have a room of one's own'" (*J*, p. 184). That she only acquires a room of her own by dying is part of the tragedy of the scene. As Kime Scott says, "Too often the mother must die in order that the unjust circumstances of her existence be seriously considered".[121] Mrs Melville's desire that Ellen should have what she never had is communicated to Richard, who promises to support Ellen, to give her that room. That Ellen's mother still looks to the male to provide and that, in the end, Richard fails to, is one of the ironic echoes in the novel.

This deathbed ending draws attention to the mother and in particular to the mother-daughter relationship. Judith Kegan Gardiner notes that in twentieth-century novels:

> the heroine's mothers represent the traditional social roles of wifehood and motherhood together with the psychological traits that conventionally

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[121] *Refiguring Modernism*, Vol. 2, p. 134.

> accompany them. The dying mothers thus embody both the stultifying roles and the negative personal traits that the daughters want to bury. Rejecting their mothers, the ambivalent daughters may still trap themselves into occupying positions like those of the mother, although the reconciliations of the maternal deathbed scene allow them at least fleetingly to feel themselves and their mothers as interdependent, yet separate, persons.[122]

The death of Mrs Melville is at once tragic and liberating. As well as experiencing profound loss, Ellen forsees the possibility of escaping the poverty and desolation her mother endured and represented: "life was going to be so glorious" (*J*, p. 197). It is at once typical of "a frightening universe" where "the laws of nature behaved like very lawless men" (*J*, p. 189) and a moment of renewal, almost rebirth.[123] As Mrs Melville lies dying, she and Ellen communicate wordlessly:

> In these moments the forgotten wisdom of the body, freed from the tyranny of the mind and its continual running hither and thither at the call of speculation, told them consoling things. The mother's flesh, touching the daughter's remembered a faint pulse felt long ago and marvelled at this splendid sequel, and lost fear. Since the past held such a miracle the future mattered nothing. Existence had justified itself.... The daughter's flesh, touching the mother's, remembered life in the womb, that loving organ that by night and day does not cease to embrace its beloved, and was the stronger for tasting again that first best draught of love that the spirit has not yet excelled (*J*, p. 185).

Mrs Melville's death is narrated through images of birth and nurturance. In this scene, she comes to represent what Marion will stand for later in the narrative: "the new maternal archetype of the twentieth century" through "This insistent mingling of images of life and death, of nurture and decay, even of sexual desire and revulsion, [which] are at the very heart of the Great Mother imago".[124] This meeting point between the younger and older woman is repeated in Part Two and made metaphorical by the end of the novel.

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[122]Judith Kegan Gardiner, "A Wake for Mother: The Maternal Deathbed in Women's Fiction", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1978), p. 148.

[123]Kime Scott notes that "In dying, Mrs Melville reminds Ellen of the primal and equally renewing semiotics of the maternal body" ("Rebecca West as a Feminist Modernist", p. 175).

[124]Marjorie McCormick, *Gender and Genre in Literature: Mothers in the English Novel, From Stereoptype to Archetype* (New York, London: Garland, 1991), p. 145.

The death of Mrs Melville signals not only the possibility of a different future for Ellen, but a stylistic shift in the text. The suffrage and New Woman themes of Book One are replaced by the larger-than-life mother figure of Marion, whose life story is related in mythic and even Gothic terms. As Sue Thomas points out: "West resolutely wrote beyond the conventional romantic closure of Book 1, the scene of Ellen and Richard walking hand in hand, suffused with the imagined glory of their future life together", into Book Two, "a book conscious of its melodramatic and Gothic textuality".[125] As melodrama, the embodiment of "the root impulse of drama - the need for dramatization ... for acting out",[126] Book Two is a deliberate performance of a series of narrative strands. Ellen's train journey from Edinburgh to London and then to the Essex marshes provides the stylistic shift, from realist to mythic, where the drama of sexual difference, femininity and maternity are to be played out. If Ellen Melville's innocence represents a process of erasure or repression of knowledge in the earlier "Sentinel" and "Adela" narratives, Marion Yaverland's Gothic presence in *The Judge* is an outburst in which the buried narratives of the abandoned mistress, daughter and mother are exposed. Marion's overwhelming passion for her illegitimate son, Richard, which both sustains and ultimately destroys him, makes her the embodiment of an archetype of the nurturing and devouring mother.[127] Marion as both devourer and life-giver[128] incarnates a "reconciliation of the Bad Mother with the Good Mother. No longer exclusively obstructive, her role now asserts her dual nature - great and terrible, loving and threatening".[129] From the

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[125]Thomas, p. 97.

[126]Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 12.

[127]Gertrude Morel in Lawrences *Sons and Lovers* could be seen as another literary predecessor. As McCormick points out: "In the years and the novels since *Sons and Lovers*, the problematic yet vitalizing relationship with the mother has become one of the century's most absorbing themes" (McCormick, p. 141).

[128]See Peterson, p. 179.

[129]McCormick, p. 118. Feminist critics have paid particular attention to the ambiguities of motherhood as they are represented in *The Judge*. Kime Scott sees the novel as "West's most concerted study of the ambivalences of mother nurture" ("The Strange Necessity of Rebecca West", p. 280). Surma discusses the way in which Marion "contradicts the comforting sign of mother" (Surma, p. 134) as well as the possibility of motherhood being a metaphor "for a utopian, productive and creative and powerful (different) future for

beginning of Book Two, Marion's role as an archetype is indicated. At Ellen's first meeting with Marion, it becomes plain that "she was still possessed of that vitality which makes people perform dramas" (*J*, p. 204). Through the clothes she wears and her gestures, Marion has a stage presence: "Her open coat slipped backwards on her shoulders so that it stood out on each side like a cloak worn by a romantic actor striding across the stage to the play's climax" (*J*, p. 207). The climax is as melodramatic as Marion's stage presence suggests. After Marion has drowned herself and after Roger's murder, Ellen and Richard go down to the marshes where she waits for Richard to make "his exorbitant demand" (*J*, p. 430). Richard climbs the sea wall and looks out over the open sea. "He was thinking of Marion, and wondering where the tide had carried her. The inexorable womb was continuing to claim its own" (*J*, p. 430).[130] Ellen's future pregnancy and single motherhood is set against this primordial landscape where Marion / mother and earth / sea / mother have become one. Marion's death in the metaphorical place of origin in the novel is the place where Ellen will conceive her child. This site of origin, in which sex (and thus maternity) and death are intricately bound, is also the place in which the daughter becomes the mother, in which repetition and continuity seem unavoidable.

In Search of a Different Plot

> "Men, like poets, rush 'into the middest,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems".[131]

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women" (Surma, p. 13). In a more critical assessment of the novel, Jane Miller sees the preoccupation with the mother as Jocasta's story: "Rebecca West attempted the impossible and proved that it was impossible. For Jocasta *is* impossible for women. It is not bearable to embody the rages and passions of a woman who takes the mother's legendary role literally" (Jane Miller, p. 119).

[130]When Ellen first meets Marion, she is struck by her obsession with water, with being near it: "'That is the river,' said Mrs Yaverland. She said it as if she desired to be out of this warmth, standing down there by the dark parapet marked by the line of lamps close to the flowing waters; as if she would have liked all the beautiful bright lights to be extinguished, so that there would be nothing left but the dark waters" (*J*, p. 206-7).

[131]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending,The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 7.

> "Can the female self be expressed through plot or must it be conceived in resistance to plot?".[132]

Ellen's fate at the end of the novel has elicited a variety of critical responses ranging from the belief that Ellen is stronger and wiser than the "mothers" before her, to disappointment and a sense of aesthetic failure. Read within a purely political context, the novel can be seen as an allegory of feminist failure and a prediction of the inadequacies of post-war feminism.[133] Beginning with the suffragette demand for equality, symbolised by the vote, the novel ends with a representation of the reinforcement of separate spheres, where women are mothers and men are fighters. If, however, "the perceived blurring of gender lines occasioned by the upheaval of war compelled society to reestablish sexual difference as a way to recreate the semblance of order",[134] West shows by the end of her novel that an emphasis on sexual difference achieves just the opposite of order. The fact that, as Shirley Peterson notes, *The Judge* begins as a quest for the vote which becomes a quest for the mother ,[135] also illustrates the novel's tracking and implicit criticism of this feminist history. Ellen's future maternity is, however, maternity out of wedlock, and her acceptance of a child as either "a son or a daughter" (*J*, p. 430) rather than legitimate or illegitimate, challenges the hypocrisy of a society which at once idealises and condemns motherhood, depending on whether it has or has not been sanctioned by patriarchal law. In writing about rape within marriage and the destructive cycle of male and female relationships, in which women are abandoned and children are labelled as outcast, West explores issues that featured among the concerns of her own feminist affiliations - the Six Point Group and the discussions published

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[132]Gillian Beer, "Beyond Determinism", p. 80.

[133]Jane Marcus describes the feminist fantasy novel of the twenties as "the direct result of political disappointment in the power of the struggle for the vote to change anything" (p. 140). "A Wilderness of One's Own: Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner", in Susan Squier, ed. *Women Writing in the City:Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (Knoxville, University of Tenessee Press, 1984), pp. 134-160.

[134]Kingsley Kent, "The Politics of Sexual Difference", p. 247.

[135]Peterson, "The Emancipation of the Heroine", p. 27.

in *Time and Tide*. In addition to the analysis of social constructions of women, the novel engages with some of the scientific and mythical narratives that lay behind and gave sanction to these social frameworks. Dramatizing the narratives of origin, Darwinian, Freudian and mythic as modes of enquiry rather than fixed assumptions, the story of Ellen Melville and Marion Yaverland explores the possibility of escaping the plot of biology, socialised and legitimated through religious and other doctrines.

West's preoccupation with origins is, in part, a preoccupation with plot, and the idea of plot is intrisically linked to the question of selfhood. As Edward Said notes: "the primordial discovery of the novel is that of self - and *primordial* is intended here in a privileged way: the primordial as preeminent, as the prior, as the first validating condition for intelligibility".[136] The problem for women writers in a post-Darwinian era was how to express the self independently of determining narratives, particularly the traditional marriage plot. In her fiction, Virginia Woolf sought ways in which to loosen the ties between self and plot in order to escape deterministic patterns.[137] While Woolf eschewed origins as a way of avoiding plot, in *The Judge* West's quest for origins which result in the exploration of a series of determining narratives, is in fact a quest for plot, pattern and meaning. In search of a plot, West is in search of a way in which to make meaning out of her own experiences. Surma highlights this quest: "For West (writing the novel around 1920) this was a time for pitting her feminism against her heavily compromised relationship with Wells, as well as trying to resolve the conflict between her public visibility as an author and critic, a model of feminist independence with her marginalization in her role as unmarried mother and mistress".[138] In seeking to resolve the contradictory narratives of her own life, West sets in motion in *The*

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[136]Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 141.
[137]Beer, "Beyond Determinism", p. 91.
[138]Surma, p. 64.

Judge narratives exploring the sources of these contradictions. Through Ellen's abandoned quest for the vote, which is replaced by learned femininity and motherhood at the end of the novel, West contemplates the irony of her own story. The "New Woman", suffragette and Freewoman whose rebellion simply ended in a different version of an old plot, adds resonance to West's claim that the novel's real meaning is located in the "the tide of the older woman's fate [meeting] the younger one's".[139]

Developing her theory of writing and reading as scenes of transference, where draft texts can be seen as potentially enacting conscious or unconscious shifts from repetition to remembering, Stanford Friedman notes: "Within this context, the earlier draft(s) might well be the most repressed, most subject to resistance and transference. The final version might represent in certain respects the author's capacity achieved through language to bring to conscious memory the issues repressed in the prior 'drafts'".[140] In view of this, West's rewriting of "The Sentinel" and *Adela* in the first part of *The Judge* and her writing beyond the unfinished ending of those earlier narratives in the second part,[141] reflects not only a development from "repetition" to "remembering" (and indeed repression), but also an act of recognition.[142] Part Two of *The Judge* fills in the spaces left by the unfinished earlier texts, the gap of the unknown future. Integrating the narrative of Marion Yaverland with that of Adela Furnival/Ellen Melville offers not only a critical reappraisal of the social and political context of the time, but also a shape or pattern in which the bewildering events of West's own lifetime, including the World War and the stigma of illegitimate motherhood, might be understood. The disaster surrounding Richard and Marion Yaverland and Ellen Melville, is

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[139]Qtd. in Glendinning, p. 81.

[140]Stanford Friedman, "The Return of the Repressed", p. 146.

[141]See Rachel du Plessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending*.

[142]Recognition is achieved not only through the layering of narratives, but through the self-consciously melodramatic framework of Part Two of *The Judge*. As Peter Brooks points out: "melodrama has the distinct value of being about recognition and clarification, about how to clear what the stakes are and what their representative signs mean, and how to face them (*The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 206).

depicted in one sense as the tragedy of sexual difference itself, "the insane sexual caprice of men, the not less mad excessive steadfastness of women" (*J*, p. 429), differences which may or may not be innate, but which are perpetuated by society. Ellen's "submission" to Richard's desire can, on one level be read as merely that, a repetition and regression from her former feminist stance. Seeking a different plot, or at least a different reading of what appears to be a narrative of repetition, West does suggest at the end of the novel that Ellen's choice is "choosing the side of victory..." (*J*, p. 430). The declaration is left ambiguous through the use of ellipsis, just as there is no real closure in the novel. Ending with an uneasy beginning, it is perhaps the very ambiguity of continuity in which West locates meaning, autobiographically and narratologically. In an assessment of Thomas Hardy's writing, West offered an apt comment on how *The Judge* might also be read. She wrote of "the power to accept tragedy: to recognize that tragedy is not always punishment from above for wrongdoing, nor a temporary hitch that can be mended, if a brisk prayer is forthcoming, by sleight of the omnipotent hand, but simply and finally tragedy; and that nevertheless life is a god to be served".[143]

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[143]"Interpreters of Their Age", *Saturday Review of Literature*, August 16, 1924, p. 42.

Conclusion

Writing Beyond the Ending

The Judge is a multifaceted novel that can be read within several contexts: Gothic, feminist and modernist, to name a few. Perhaps its greatest interest lies, however, in its narrative, at once retrospective and disruptive, simultaneously returning to the past and breaking with it. In *The Judge*, West, through the melodramatic figure of Marion Yaverland, confronts an earlier version of herself, first imagined and projected in "The Sentinel". Through her earliest novel, West's reconsideration of suffragette aspirations and failures on both a personal and historical level in *The Judge* is made more powerful. The striking variety of concerns in "The Sentinel" also reflects the extraordinary depth and range of West's interests that continued to inform her journalism and fiction over the next decade. Similarly, *The Judge*, Janus-like, looks back on both a literary and personal past, while stylistically and even metaphorically anticipating continuities and shifts in West's journalism and fiction during the twenties.[1]

The diversification of her journalism precipitated some of these changes. Not only did she continue to write for highbrow journals such as *Time and Tide* and *The New Statesman*, but she also began publishing articles in popular magazines, such as *The Woman's Journal* and *Women's Pictorial.* Writing for less intellectual forums may well have been motivated by financial needs, but at the same time, West's blurring of the boundaries between so-called 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' writing becomes a characteristic of her work and a conscious strategy. Such "border-crossings" are the extraordinary and sometimes

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[1]In his discussion of Rebecca West's theatre criticism during the 1920s, John Stokes notes a similar retrospectiveness: "Much of what West wrote there was retrospective, looking back to the Edwardian period and to her own past" (John Stokes, "'A Woman of Genius': Rebecca West at the Theatre". ed. Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan. *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 187.

incongruous feature of her essay, "The Strange Necessity" (in *The Strange Necessity*, 1928) in which James Joyce's *Ulysses* is discussed in relation to Pavlov's recently published *Conditioned Reflexes* (1927), and in relation to a perambulation around Paris in search of dresses and hats. West as *flâneuse,* scientific commentator and art critic, defies all previous traditional categories of "male" and "female" behaviour. Continuing her earlier engagement with feminist, aesthetic and scientific discourses, but seeking innovative alliances between them, West set up challenges for herself and for her readers. Through these approaches, West maintains the precedent she set in her earliest journalism and critical practices, developing and extending them. Her challenge to the establishment becomes at once playful and more assertive, forcing readers to reconsider conventional associations between masculinity, professionalism and high art. She confronts revered figures such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot with a critical practice that combines "the habits of imaginative work"[2] with shopping trips and celebrations of a higher income, providing not only a room of one's own but "an islet of red rocks with a cove" in the South of France.[3] In *Harriet Hume* (1929), her only other novel published during the twenties, West couches her recurring interests in a similarly playful mode and employs a more "feminine" discourse, revealing new literary affinities and affiliations. *Harriet Hume* enacts at once a resumption of West's concerns with sexual difference, presented in melodramatic fashion in *The Judge* (and reproduced to some extent in *Sunflower*, also written during this period and published posthumously), and an experiment in mixed genres. Such blatant disregard for established classifications and hierarchies in her fiction and journalism, and the growing proximity in her writing between

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[2]"Tradition in Criticism" in *Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature: Addresses Delivered at the City Literary Institute.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 194.

[3]"Days of Long Hair and Fine Horses", *Time and Tide* July 26, 1929, p. 904.

these two practices, remains an important area for further discussion.[4]

The process of reassessment of feminist and aesthetic positions was a consistent characteristic of West's writing, evident even in her earliest literary attempts. West's texts negotiate a variety of differing discourses, either treating them critically or attempting to understand and assimilate them, but always asserting the possibility of change, in particular, a change for women and for women writers. It is this aspect that makes it impossible to categorise her work, either as "realist", "modernist", or "female modernist". In her journalism and fiction during the period 1910-1922, and extending into the twenties, West engages in a continuous dialogue with other texts and with her own, constantly shifting perspectives in an attempt to capture the complexities of her subject. Sifting through the layers of writing that compose the early Rebecca West reveals a series of slightly altered canvases. Together they constitute a rich and complex portrait of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Separately they illustrate the development of a writer whose work was to keep changing and adapting throughout her long career, while keeping faith with her earliest preoccupations - feminist politics and art.

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[4]Austin Brigg's reconsideration of West's "The Strange Necessity" in "Rebecca West vs James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and William Carlos Williams" in *Joyce in the Hibernian Metropolis: Essays*. eds. Morris Beja and David Norris (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), marks an important shift in contemporary critical attention to West as literary critic.

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