



WEST WORDS

The Newsletter of the International Rebecca West Society

Number 5 Winter 08

FROM THE PRESIDENT

There is something unique about the Rebecca West Society, and I have no doubt that this has a great deal to do with Rebecca West herself. Every meeting of the West Society is suffused by a deep spirit of thoughtfulness, humor, and fellowship. It would be reductive to attribute this quality of good cheer solely to the personality of Rebecca West—we all know that she did not only have a sunny side. But there is something more enduring than character, a compelling quality that emanates from her work—a quality that I would like to define as an affirmative moral and aesthetic principle. There is consequently a kind of life-force that pulsates throughout our proceedings—when we work on and with West—that may well be rare among literary societies. Our conferences promote a distinctive culture of freedom, ease, and inclusiveness. When discussing Rebecca West and her work, the

distance between scholarly discourse and lively debate about today's affairs, between critical inquiry and appreciation, and between the book and the wine bottle is never unbridgeable. The Society further encourages inclusiveness by inviting speakers to give oral presentations rather than reading off the page, by welcoming diverse and interdisciplinary inquiries, by breaking down rigid barriers between scholars and non-scholars (and between academic ranks), and by emphasizing cooperation between scholars and representatives of the author's estate. It never fails to amaze academics when I say that the Rebecca West Society is working together closely and harmoniously with members of the author's literary estate. In fact, the estate's co-executor, Helen Macleod, has been a member of the Society's board of officers since the inception of the Society, and other

relatives of West offer regular highlights at our bi-annual conferences. This dynamic could serve as a model for other literary associations.

The same spirit of friendliness, open-mindedness, and interaction has also given rise to some remarkable collaborative initiatives. First, there is the anthology of critical essays, *Rebecca West Today* (2006), which showcases the diversity of interests among West scholars while also radiating a strong sense of the importance and relevance of this writer. Then, there is the current project of putting together a new collection of West's biting, witty, profound, and galvanizing shorter writings, including a selection of her magisterial book reviews as well as journal articles on topics ranging from luxury cars, to the Hollywood celebrity cult, to delivering vegetables during a bombing raid on

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FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

The Third Biennial Rebecca West conference, housed once again at the stately Mercantile Library in midtown Manhattan during warm and beautiful September days, showcased superb papers from established as well as new, promising scholars and boasted performances by West herself via audio-visual recordings. We shared good talk, food, and drink; there were West Society t-shirts for sale (modeled personally by some stylish Camp West alumnae) as well as books by and about West; and Helen Macleod provided us each with conference buttons to sport with our badges.

We began with an International Rebecca West Society business meeting, and it was exciting to realize how much we have accomplished since our first conference only four years ago. The 2006 publication of *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary Critical*

Approaches—essays presented at the 2003 conference and edited for publication by our new president Bernard Schweizer—was a crowning achievement. (Be sure that your library has a copy!) Thaine Stearns, with the help of some of his students at Sonoma State University, has been working on a comprehensive West bibliography. Some filmmakers have expressed interest in documentaries about West. And four West Society board members—Helen Macleod (West's great-niece), Debra Rae Cohen, Ann Norton, and Bernard Schweizer—spent four days in the University of Tulsa Special Collections Library reading West's book reviews, newspaper and journal articles, and miscellaneous papers—even the marginalia of her own books!—in an effort to find gems for a new West collection. Bernard Schweizer was elected the new

president and Ann Norton re-elected as Vice President; Helen Macleod, stepping down as secretary-treasurer, was elected trustee, as was Debra Rae Cohen and incumbent Dennis Drabelle; and we amended the bylaws to make the past president an honorary board member, so West biographer Carl Rollyson, our first president, will remain active in the society officially as well as inevitably (we won't let him go!).

And of course there was money; conferences and scholarly trips to Tulsa, etc., require it. We discussed strategies for expanding membership and raising funds for society events, which included the "Idiot" (for women) and "Lunatic" (for men) t-shirts we had on sale. (The whole quote, from the prologue of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, appears on the back.) If you would like a t-shirt, please contact

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Cont. from page 1

London. This planned collection, tentatively titled “Best of West” will attract a great deal of attention, and I can promise that it will keep you spellbound, tingling, and laughing out loud. The story of how four officers of the West Society went to the archives in Tulsa to locate appropriate articles for inclusion in this collection is contained in Helen Macleod’s essay in this newsletter. Then, there is the bibliography of works by and about Rebecca West. This major undertaking is led by Thaine Stearns in collaboration with several research assistants and members of the West Society. Thaine deserves our utmost gratitude for tackling a project that promises to be a landmark achievement in the history of West studies. Next, there is my own collaboration with a group of graduate students in New York, who are purging the corrupted text of *The Return of the Soldier*, which is circulating in various cheap editions. This group, in collaboration with scholars associated with the West Society, is also embarked on another unprecedented task: the creation of a critical edition of *The Return of the Soldier*, complete with editorial, historical, and critical apparatuses.

My vision for the next two years is to continue the course charted by our first president, Carl Rollyson, who shaped the inclusive and holistic orientation of the Society. I mean to bring various initiatives begun under his presidency to conclusion, notably the publication of the “Best of West” collection, the completion of the bibliography, and the issue of the critical edition of *The Return of the Soldier*. Among the other priorities of my presidency, I see the expansion of the membership base, adequate means of fund-raising, strengthening our internet presence (notably by establishing an online network of the West scholars), and encouraging junior researchers to join the West movement as the most pressing issues. As for the latter, I am determined to institute a bi-annual travel award of \$1,000 each for two graduate students to be given on a competitive basis. The first time this “Rebecca West Traveling Research Fellowship” will be given out is in 2009.

This brings me to the biggest milestone for our Society in the near future: the

2009 conference, to be held in London! I am privileged to have made the acquaintance of Joanna Labon, from the University of Kent, who is leading the organization of the next conference, aptly titled “Rebecca West in London” (see her note in this newsletter). With Dr. Labon, the Society has gained a most competent, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic champion of West studies. She is joining the list of other tireless volunteers, especially Carl Rollyson, Ann Norton, Helen Macleod, Debra Rae Cohen, Thaine Stearns, Dennis Drabelle, Sadie Cahoon and others, who have lent their expertise to the society and thus helped to turn the Rebecca West Society into a successful organization. To all these bright, motivated, kindred spirits I extend my very cordial thanks!

—Bernard Schweizer

FROM THE VP

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Bernard Schweizer. And if you live in New York City, you can pick one up at the front desk of the Mercantile Library (17 East 47th Street). AND if you have ideas for fundraising, please contact any one of us.

Our first panel, “West and Biography,” started us off with Carl Rollyson’s discussion of West’s “contrarian” criticism, Susan Erickson’s consideration of music and West’s family in the Aubrey trilogy, and Joanna Labon’s look at West’s fascination with Saint Augustine. After some wine, hors d’oeuvres, and chat, we saw and heard West “in person.” First we listened to a young (and gorgeously British) West read from *Harriet Hume* in a recording from 1929, and it was an eerie evocation of a West none of us had known but often imagined. Next we heard her interviewed on the BBC program *Bookshelf* from 1981; it was a sparkling retrospective that looked back over West’s entire career and assessed her place in 20th century literature and thought. Finally, we watched the 1981 Bill Moyers interview, taped at her final London home less than two years before her death. Regal, wise, articulate, and, of course hilarious—we were in stitches more than once—West appears as both the grande dame of British letters and a practical, thoughtful witness to the global twentieth century. One of the most striking moments came when she claimed it was much

easier to be bombed during the Second World War than it was to sit on the sidelines in the first.

Saturday’s first panel focused on West, modernism, and culture. Laura Cowan discussed *Sunflower* and *Letter to a Grandfather* as reactions to the “fall of liberalism,” which created a linguistic crisis resulting in an attention to performance. Martin Hipsky read *The Strange Necessity* as a significant modernist manifesto, and Thaine Stearns connected West’s “spirit of music” in the Aubrey trilogy to modernism’s contentious debates about visual images. In the second panel, on West and politics, Alexis Blane showed ways in which West’s “travel narrative” *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* can be understood as a complex negotiation intended to support the ideals of classical liberalism. Galina Dubova examined the construction and representation of the Russian nation in *The Birds Fall Down*. After a delicious lunch, Bernard Schweizer and his graduate students Charles Thorne, Jamie Anderson, and Nell Stewart described their work on a critical edition of *The Return of the Soldier*.

West Society trustee and *Washington Book World* editor Dennis Drabelle introduced our distinguished keynote speaker Francine Prose, a novelist, literary critic, and unabashed Rebecca West fan. She spoke of her love for West’s essay on Charlotte Brontë and her fascination with the journalistic essays “Greenhouse with Cyclamens” and “Opera in Greenville.” In fact, she named *A Train of Powder*, where these essays appear, and *The Meaning of Treason* as her favorite West works, highlighting particularly West’s style and reading a few of her favorite sentences with glee. Prose remarked that her nineteen-year-old son was “amazed” by some of the sentences in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, and that with her students she does close readings, line by line, for the sheer appreciation of their beauty. It was thrilling to hear a contemporary, highly successful writer in many genres praise Rebecca West so generously and sincerely. We hope to see Ms. Prose at conferences again.

Jane Marcus could not join us, unfortunately, but Margaret Stetz beautifully read her paper for the next panel, on West and Feminism. Marcus claimed that West contributed hugely

to Woolf's reputation, since West's respected stance as public intellectual and book reviewer enabled her to celebrate Woolf's "high fountain of genius" and counteract voices who named her only a "difficult" modernist writer. E. Brookes Little examined West's potential anxiety as a modernist writer, as well as her acute political and social consciousness, in "Indissoluble Matrimony." In the following panel on West and journalism, Loretta Stec looked at Djuna Barnes' and West's early journalism, both of whom were significant women writers before, during, and after World War I. Stec compared West's rhetorical style and political focus with Barnes' subtler and often ironic perspective on mainstream women's issues. Will Gravely, a native of South Carolina, went "behind the scenes" and reconstructed specific aspects of West's time in the Carolinas that inspired "Opera in Greenville." And after some food and wine, again, we members of "Camp West," the team of scholars who last July plumbed the West archives at the University of Tulsa, regaled our audience with tales of mirth, food, and fascination (see Helen Macleod's article).

On Sunday morning we were a small but hardy crowd, and two young West scholars started us off. Robert Planos discussed his painstaking work on the text of *The Return of the Soldier* (see his article), and Caroline Krzakowski analyzed *The Return of the Soldier* and *Cousin Rosmaund* as fictional counterparts to West's reportage of the post-war treason trials and the Nuremberg trials. Margaret Stetz then showed us the extraordinary parallels between *The Return of the Soldier* and Isabel Colegate's *The Shooting Party*, both of which were made into beautiful films directed by Alan Bridges. We finished with a roundtable that summarized existing projects and ideas for expansion of the society and West scholarship generally. Thaine Stearns explained his work on the up-to-date West bibliography (see his article); Bernard Schweizer discussed ways we could use the internet to expand our society base; and I ended with a general call to action, encouraging all members to support the Rebecca West Society and to seek new members and new exposure for our purpose.

Overall, it was another highly

successful, extremely enjoyable conference. On to London! Please make plans now to attend the conference in 2009. (See Joanna Labon's article). And thanks to all who made the 2007 conference so wonderful. —Ann Norton

IN THE NEWS

The publication of *The Paris Review Interviews, Volume 1* (Canongate Press, 2007, with an introduction by Philip Gourevitch), inspired many reviewers to wallow in West's fearless wit. Alex Clark in the January 28, 2007, *Observer* calls Marina Warner's interview with Dame Rebecca West "a peerless exhibition of de haut en bas self-possession. Who would be Warner, flashing her intellectual credentials by pointing out how Ian McEwan had been influenced by St Augustine's theory of evil, only to provoke this response: 'Yes, but he doesn't really do very much with it, does he? This thing just presents you with the hairs along people's groins and the smell and very little else.'" (p. 22)

Alister McMillan, in the April 29, 2007, *South China Morning Post*, writes, "Rebecca West says she wishes she could do a book in one draft. 'Do you know anyone who can?' Her interviewer replies: 'I think D.H. Lawrence did.' West: 'You could often tell.' She dismisses Tolstoy, says Somerset Maugham 'couldn't write for toffee' and describes E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* as "all about people making a fuss about nothing, which isn't really enough." (p. 5)

John Wright and Emma MacDonald in the April 14, 2007 edition of *The Courier Mail* (Australia) claim that "Rebecca West's 1981 interview is full of wit and perceptiveness and yet she's humble. She also speaks of her parents' fondness for Australia and talks about men: 'The men near you always hinder you because they always want you to do the traditional female things and they take a lot of time.'" (Pg. M27)

Stephen Phelan summarized several interviews in the January 21, 2007 *Sunday Herald*, and quotes views we heard West similarly articulate in the Bill Moyers' interview at the conference. Warner asked West how her "sense of justice and pity" was developed by living through the first and second world wars. "I think the second world war was

much more comfortable, because in the first world war the position of women was so terrible, because there you were, not in danger. Men were going out and getting killed for you and you'd much prefer they weren't...The awful feeling for a small professional army was that they were recruited from poor people who went out and got killed. There was a genuine humanitarian feeling of guilt about that in the first war. It was really better, in the second world war, when the people at home got bombed. I found it a relief. You were taking your chance and you might be killed and you weren't in that pampered sort of unnatural state." (Seven Days; Pg. 16)

Jonathan Raban in *The Guardian*, January 13, 2007, appreciates West, but finds her too daunting to be a personal muse. "For the crackle of lively, impromptu conversation spiked with malice, there's Marina Warner's 1981 interview with Rebecca West, who loftily disparages, among others, the Virgin Mary ('she always looks so dull'), her son Anthony West, Tolstoy, Forster, Eliot ('a poseur'), Maugham ('he couldn't write for toffee, bless his heart'), McEwan, Cyril Connolly ('he wasn't an interesting person. As for writing, he was fond of it, as you might say. But he didn't know much about it, did he?'), Yeats ('He wasn't a bit impressive'). Warner brilliantly translates West's talk into print: nearly a quarter-century after her death, her voice, laden with the ironic inflections of another age, rings with quite extraordinary vitality—in phrase after phrase, you see the curling of her upper lip, the gleam of patrician mischief in her eye. But one would hardly go to the formidable Miss West for hints and tips." (Pages; Pg. 22)

In *The Guardian* on May 18, 2007, John Britton writes, "It's no surprise that Noel Coward was inspired to write *Peace in Our Time*...a play about what life in England might have been like under the Nazis. He was named in one of the earliest works of fiction imagining a Nazi victory, the 1940 German army 'Special Search List Great Britain,' as one of 2,300 prominent Britons to be arrested after a successful invasion. On learning of the book, Rebecca West telegraphed Noel Coward to say: 'My dear—the people we should have been seen dead with.'" (p. 43)

Holly Brubach writes about Noel Coward in the Sunday September 16, 2007, edition of *The New York Times*, discussing several recent biographies and recommending, among others, *Noel Coward: A Biography by Philip Hoare*, which “deftly interweaves the themes of Coward’s work with the spirit of his times...He quotes Rebecca West’s contention that Coward ‘took a serious historic interest in the social changes of the time’ and that he had ‘a better grasp of what was going wrong in our society than Shaw.’” (Men’s Fashion Magazine; Biblio File; Pg. 152)

The November 11, 2007, *Canberra Times* review of *Joseph Conrad: A Life by Zdzislaw Najder* and John Stape’s *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad* posits that “Stape’s succinct way of dealing with the complexities of Conrad’s ‘several lives’ must be applauded, but his over-reliance on cliché has to be chastised...He dismisses H.G. Wells as a ‘Grubstreeter,’ an inelegant coinage that is cruelly unfair to a writer of more distinction and percipience than Virginia Woolf, who deemed Jessie Conrad fat and common. And the word ‘novelist’ seems inadequate to account for Rebecca West.” (A; Pg. 20)

Peter J. M. Wayne in the January 20, 2007, edition of *The Daily Telegraph* reviewed *A Very English Hangman* by Leonora Klein and says, “Rebecca West noted in *The New Yorker* that ‘no wise person will write an unnecessary word about hanging, for fear of straying into the pornographic.’” (Features; Books; Pg. 10)

The May 9, 2007 *Weekend Australian* contains an obituary of Lesley Blanch, author of *The Wilder Shores of Love*, “an enduringly popular account of the romantic fulfillment that four 19th-century European women found in Arabia.” It notes that she lived for awhile in Paris and entertained friends who included Nancy Mitford and Rebecca West, who had, she said, “a pawky sense of humour.” Pawky?? (News; Pg. 23)

Clive James, in the June 6, 2007, Australian Literary Review edition of *The Australian* wraps up a long reflective article about literary criticism and reviewing with a reference to West. “[O]ne’s aim as a writer should go beyond preserving one’s self-esteem. Nothing can be done without it, but as

an end in itself it always causes damage even to the writer of poetry, let alone to the writer of fiction; and to the writer of criticism it is quite ruinous. Rebecca West once argued that bad poems and bad novels can be counted on to get rid of themselves but bad criticism is a true calamity, breaking the chain of a long conversation by which sound opinion is transmitted through the generations. She might have added that the motor of bad criticism is almost always conceit, readily detectable by its interest in revenge.” (Pg. 25)

Peter Stanford’s interview with actor Daniel Day-Lewis in the January 13, 2008, edition of *The Observer* includes West’s description of his father, C. Day-Lewis. “There is something of [C. Day-Lewis] in his son, perhaps more markedly as he gets older—a craggy, lined handsomeness that had Rebecca West remark of the poet laureate that he was ‘like a Greek Apollo, with some irregularities set in to make him look not too bright and good for human nature’s daily food.’” (Review Features Pages; Pg. 6)

The Wall Street Journal asked Edward Mendelson, Professor of English at Columbia University and W.H. Auden’s literary executor, to list “five best” books on marriage. In the January 5-6, 2008, edition, he named West’s 1918 novel *The Return of the Soldier* as one. “This brief and devastating novel explores the conflict between marital duty and romantic love but is startlingly different from the many hundreds of other novels on the same theme...For Chris, the sober reality of marriage...is an illusion, and the bright illusion of romance is a reality. Rebecca West’s first novel is a masterpiece of surprise and inevitability, with an ending that evokes intense and unresolvable feelings.” (p. W8) Mendelson (along with Carl Rollyson) provided a foreword to Ann V. Norton’s 2000 monograph *Paradoxical Feminism: The Novels of Rebecca West*, which began as a dissertation under Mendelson’s tutelage.

Not all of the press about West is positive, of course; she remains a controversial figure. In the August 4, 2007 *Weekend Australia*, Anna Sebba writes about her conversation with Victoria Glendinning, distinguished biographer of Rebecca West, Vita Sackville-West, and Leonard Woolf, among others. Glendinning recounts,

“Rebecca asked me to write her life; I knew her through Terence [de Vere White, literary critic of the Irish Times and Glendinning’s second husband] and went to see her from time to time. She used to inquire what I was giving the boys for tea and write me long letters giving her version of her life. But I fear I was a disappointment as I wasn’t really free to sit at her feet.” (Review; Pg. 8)

Robert Fulford, in a personal essay published in the December 22, 2007 edition of Canada’s *National Post*, pays West a somewhat back-handed compliment, but she would agree with his description of art’s value. “The arts won’t make you virtuous and they won’t make you smart, but they are nevertheless my faith, firmly installed in the part of me where some people put religion...As for those who create art, we get it all wrong if we imagine their work makes them admirable in private life. Rebecca West, a great journalist of the last century, remarked (rather like Antonio Salieri discussing Mozart in *Amadeus*) that ‘the power to create a work of art, like a good complexion, is frequently bestowed on the undeserving.’ So my faith, rather like Christianity, comes with no guarantees of virtue or enhanced intelligence. What, then, does it guarantee? Those who give it their time and love are offered the chance to live more expansive, more enjoyable and deeper lives.” (Pg. A22)

Stefan Collini, in the February 16, 2008, *London Guardian*, asks whether or not Rebecca West had the “authority” as a critic that he believes Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot (despite West’s criticism) had, and he answers in the negative. He compares Woolf’s “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” with West’s “Uncle Bennett.” “Woolf’s essay, published posthumously, is much more of a manifesto, a statement by a rival about how fiction was now to be practised, a validation of Modernist experimentation. But there is also a difference in the register of the two pieces and the implied audience in each case. West is addressing the wider public, grabbing its attention, shamelessly pulling out the vox humana, and sending her readers home with the warning thought that, for all Bennett’s limitations, ‘he remains an artist.’ Woolf’s more fastidious and discriminating intelligence addresses itself to a more

thoughtful audience, one already drawn to but puzzled by the works of Joyce and Eliot.”

He goes on to compare her with Eliot. “West deplored his use of ‘tradition’ as a stick with which to beat writing that he regarded as undisciplined or self-indulgent—writing that West thought likely to possess the essential spark of creativity...But in attacking Eliot, she is also fighting for space for herself: she felt that she had to ‘perform, albeit far from ‘humbly,’ if she was not to be disregarded by a literary culture that took its tone from Eliot...Initially, she had nothing to fall back on other than the quality of her writing and the

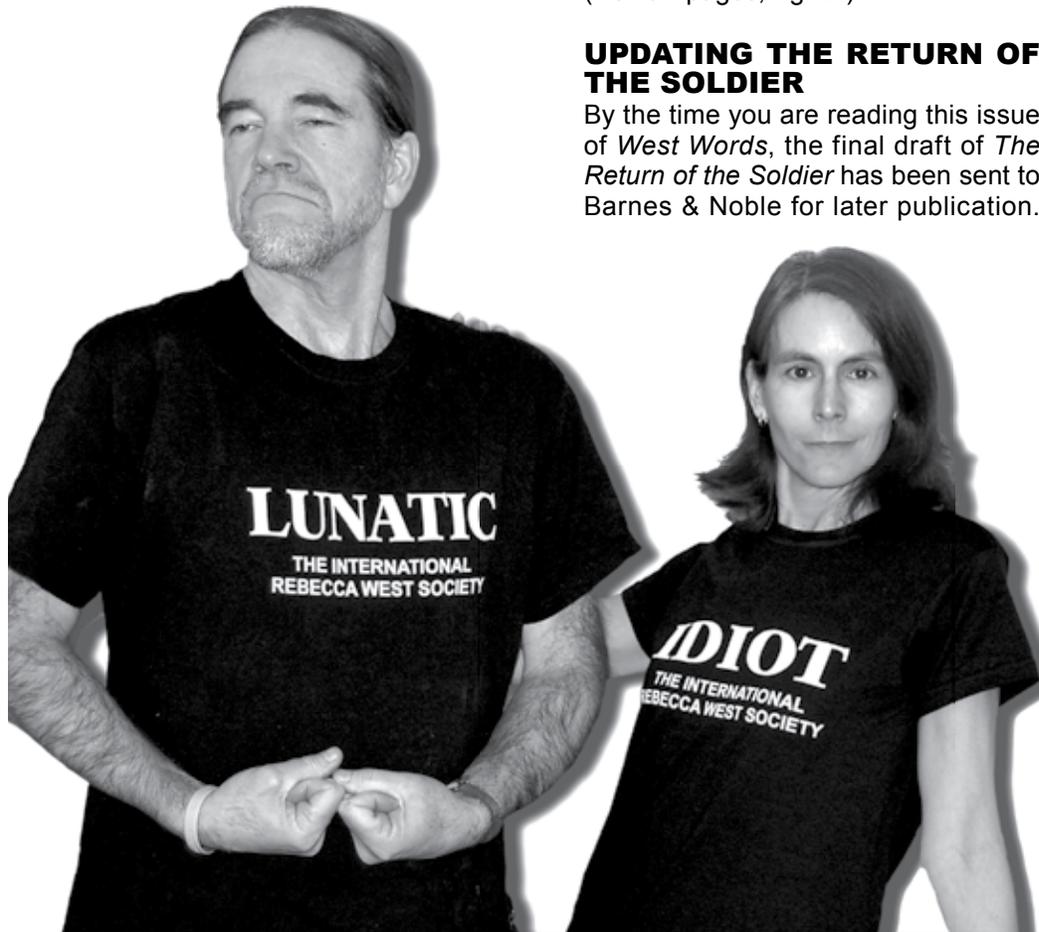
tangible presence of her own literary personality: amusing, lively, unafraid, adept with the battle-axe and scalping knife. In time, her authority came from being ‘Rebecca West,’ the well-known writer, but also from the continuing vivacity of her reviewing...but perhaps she was not altogether wrong to sense that she did not command the unreserved esteem of the most influential of her fellow-critics. Performing, grabbing attention, making a splash: these are the seductive sirens of literary journalism. While they may help to launch a career as a reviewer, in the longer term they cannot help but diminish the reputation of the critic.” (Review pages; Pg. 21)

UPDATING THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER

By the time you are reading this issue of *West Words*, the final draft of *The Return of the Soldier* has been sent to Barnes & Noble for later publication.

After careful cross-examination of the British Nisbet & Co. edition (1918) and the American Century Co. edition (1918), both now in the public domain, I have updated the Barnes & Noble edition to conform to the Nisbet Co. edition. The previous Barnes & Noble edition, published in 2006 and based on the America Century Co. edition, was riddled with hundreds of mistakes and differed almost categorically from the text’s first edition, i.e. the Nisbet & Co. text. In most cases the contemporary Penguin text (based on the 1977 Viking edition) matches that of the Nisbet; however, divergences do occasionally occur. Typically these divergences are minor punctuation details (such as a double dash instead of a comma or *vice versa*), but occasionally a nuance of meaning is effected, such as in the sentence, “He would hesitate, she would make one of her harried gestures and trail away with that wet patient look which was her special line” (Penguin 57), where “harried” should read “harassed.” In such instances I have deviated from the Penguin text and restored the text of the Nisbet & Co. edition. The long passages that have been entirely changed or simply omitted in the Century Co. and subsequent editions (such as Dover Publications) have been corrected. Upon re-publication, the Barnes & Noble edition will be the ideal text for enjoyment and classroom study. Teachers and scholars of West should use this cheap edition, which has been restored to reflect the original text of the novel. In the interim, the most reliable version of *The Return of the Soldier* is the Penguin edition.

—Robert Planos



...THE WORD “IDIOT” COMES FROM A GREEK ROOT MEANING PRIVATE PERSON. IDIOTCY 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 OUTLINES OF EVERY OBJECT BUT NOT THE DETAILS INDICATIVE OF THEIR NATURE.

Rebecca West

You too can be a proud idiot or lunatic! Order your Rebecca West Society t-shirt now. Send a \$20 check to Bernard Schweizer, 236 Glenn Avenue, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC UPDATE

Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles 1910-1939, by Katie Roiphe, Dial Press, 343 pages, \$34. In this popular, much-reviewed book, Roiphe includes a chapter on West and H.G. and Jane Wells among her analyses of “uncommon” marriages from the modernist era.

Marina Mackay has had a productive year—congratulations to her! She edited and introduced *British Fiction After Modernism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, which includes the chapter “The Greater Tragedy Imposed on the Small: Art, Anachrony, and the Perils of Bohemia in Rebecca West’s *The Fountain Overflows*,” by Victor Sage.

She also published *Modernism and World War II*, Cambridge UP, 2007, which contains the chapter “Rebecca West’s anti-Bloomsbury group.”

Seamus O’Malley contributed the essay “*The Return of the Soldier* and *Parade’s End*: Ford’s Reworking of West’s Pastoral” to *Ford Madox Ford’s Literary Contacts*, edited by Paul Skinner, Rodopi, 2007.

Marcella Soldani’s essay “Violated Territories: Monkey Island, Baldry Court, and No Man’s Land in Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*” appears in *Literary Landscapes, Landscape in Literature*. Rome: Carocci, 2007.

Mary Anne Schofield’s chapter “Less than a Whisper Raised Against the Massed Music: British Women Writers Address 1930s British Fascism” appears in *Women in Europe Between the Wars: Politics, Culture, and Society*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.

Francesca Frigerio’s translation of “Parthenope.” Fidenza: Mattioli 1885 S.P.A., 2006. This translation is followed by Francesca’s essay “Modernità E Rovine: Le Fantasie Urbane Di Rebecca West.”

Carl Rollyson, West’s most recent biographer, has published *Biography: A User’s Guide*. It’s an informative and entertaining text for those interested in biography. No aspect of the genre, from A to Z, goes uncovered: issues around authorized and unauthorized biography, censorship, libel, fair use, public domain (referred to as PD by publishers and editors), and a great deal more—including examples drawn from

published biographies, as well as general and specific assessments of the biographer’s art. Ivan R. Dee, available May 9, 2008.

THE REBECCA WEST BIBLIOGRAPHY PROJECT

The Rebecca West Bibliography, a major undertaking initiated by the Rebecca West Society in 2006, will soon be available online to Society members and in more limited ways to other readers interested in her work and in scholarship about her. Currently approaching 1500 entries, and eventually containing many more, the bibliography promises to be invaluable for ongoing research and for revitalizing interest in this towering twentieth-century intellect. In its completed form, this resource will list primary works by West, both published and unpublished, and secondary works about West and her writing. The online bibliography will be searchable, editable, and will employ fully accessible technology for disabled scholars and readers.

Because West’s work is extensive both in sheer quantity and in its range of topics and word count, several decisions have been made about how to divide the bibliography into useful categories. Those general categories provisionally include primary works by West, subdivided into book-length novels and non-fiction texts and short stories and essays collected and published in book form; uncollected essays, interviews, and articles published in periodicals; and unpublished work by West. The latter subcategory remains a major bibliographic project yet to be completed. There will also be a separate section listing audio and visual recordings of West. Secondary work about the writer will be divided into subcategories that include books and essays principally about West; reviews about her work; and books and essays that contain substantial discussions of West, without her being the main focus. Society members will be able to access all parts of the bibliography. Non-members will have free access to categories including primary published works and book-length biographical and scholarly accounts of her life and work.

Thaine Stearns, the current Librarian-Bibliographer for the Society, has been assisted in bringing this project to

fruition by several people at his home institution, Sonoma State University, including his Research Assistants Kelly Crowley, Cyndi Varady, and Allison Madsen; and by Barbara Moore, Director of University Web Services. In addition, several Rebecca West Society members have contributed significant recommendations or have committed themselves to important parts of the project, including Bernard Schweizer and Caroline Krzakowski.

TEACHING CORNER

For the last three years I have been teaching *Woman as Artist and Thinker* (iUniverse, 2005) to my students in Writing II, a required course in the base curriculum at Baruch College, The City University of New York. Instructors are expected to assign literary texts in different genres since this is a course focusing on writing about literature.

My students enter the course knowing nothing about West, so I spend a class period introducing her and her work. I explain how her writing cuts across many different genres of fiction and nonfiction but that her themes and concerns remain constant no matter what forms her writing takes.

I treat *Woman as Artist and Thinker* as an example of the great variety and depth of West’s writing. To read the entire volume, however, is to appreciate the unity of her work, to see how her involvement in describing her own life is linked to her reporting about the world of major events. What she says about her own family experience in “I Regard Marriage with Fear and Horror,” I point out, recurs in quite another dimension in her short story, “Parthenope.” Indeed, I suggest that the autobiographical essay and the story are both concerned with human psychology, feminism, and family relationships—all of which also exist in the broader geo-political realm that an essay like “The Necessity and Grandeur of the International Idea” explores.

In all of her work, West explores crucial questions about the role of the family in shaping the individual psyche. Marriage as an institution plays a key part, of course, in several of the essays in *Woman as Artist and Thinker*. The title essay—admittedly a difficult one for students to absorb—can be explained in terms of what West reveals about herself as a woman and artist in her other essays.

WESTWORDS

The International Rebecca West Society Newsletter

Volume 5: Winter 2008

President

Bernard Schweizer

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If you wish to become a member, please send your name, title, institutional affiliation, address, and a check made out to "International Rebecca West Society."

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Membership Fees

Regular: \$30 per year

Reduced fee: \$10 per year
for graduate students,
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I teach the essays just as they are presented in *Woman as Artist and Thinker* since the chronological development of West's work is important. How she regards religion, for example, changes as she grows older. Similarly, a very short essay, "Goodness Doesn't Just Happen," reflects her mature perspective on her early radicalism and shows that she does not repudiate it but rather demonstrates why that radicalism requires a counterbalancing adherence to the rule of law.

My hope is that *Woman as Artist and Thinker* will become one of the core introductory texts for teaching West. Certainly she wrote essays that are more accessible to students, and more entertaining, but taken in its totality *Woman as Artist and Thinker* demonstrates, as I argue in my introduction to the volume, West's centrality and why we should still feel drawn to her life and work. —Carl Rollyson

LONDON WEST CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 2009

Our next conference, "Rebecca West in London," will be held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London, on Friday 18 and Saturday 19 September 2009. All members of the Society are warmly invited to London.

Our London conference organiser is Dr. Joanna Labon, who teaches at the University of Kent. Please see the Institute of English Studies website for details. <http://ies.sas.ac.uk/index.htm>

The Institute for English Studies is at the heart of London University. Located on Malet Street, in Bloomsbury, it is near many sites key to British Modernism, including the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA, where West studied as an actress), Gordon Square (where the Woolfs lived), Russell Square (where T.S.Eliot was poetry editor at Faber) and Great Ormond Street where in Autumn 1928 West glimpsed Virginia with her 'pale fine face' (Ending in Earnest). Visitors will also be invited to tour the London Library where West was Vice-President from 1967 to 1983 and where her portrait still hangs between those of Isaiah Berlin and Rudyard Kipling. —Joanna Labon

NOTES AND QUERIES

Here's a query from Julie Hasler. "I have this quote below which I found (I think in a book called *Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much*) some years ago and wrote down. I wonder if you know where it comes from or in fact if it is a quote directly from Rebecca West's writings. I see in Wikipedia a quote with a similar meaning but not the same

wording. The quote is: "Life ought to be a struggle of desire towards adventures whose nobility will fertilise the soul."

I think this is one of the rotating quotes on our website as well, but I don't know its origin. If you can identify the quote, please contact julie.hasler@noos.fr.

If you are interested in hearing the 1990s Canadian indie rock group Rebecca West, headed by Alison Outhit, here's a website where you can sample their songs and read about them:

http://www.zunior.com/product_info.php?products_id=1694

CAMP WEST

I've never been to Tulsa, Oklahoma before and, as far as I know, neither had my great aunt, Rebecca West. As I sat in a rental car on the outskirts of the University of Tulsa campus, along with three West scholars, being bombarded by hailstones the size of the end of my thumb, I reflected that there were probably very good reasons for both these facts. We sat there together wordlessly, as people do in stationary cars when they're waiting for something outside to stop, and I had cause to reflect further that this was a pretty weird place for the majority of Rebecca West's papers to end up. So weird, she might have gotten a kick out of it.

We went to Tulsa in search of Rebecca's previously uncollected writing, with a view to putting together a fun, accessible collection of her work appealing to the modern, educated but non-specialized reader. Someone who takes *The New Yorker* rather than *People* magazine, say. The sort of person I meet at a party and who says: "Oh, yes, I've heard of her. Didn't she write...ummm? What did she write again?" The sort of person, moreover, who remains interested while I stumble through my explanation: "Well (wry laugh) her most famous work is a 1,200 page book about Yugoslavia in the 1930s, but she covered the Nuremberg trials for *The New Yorker* and she wrote a lot of novels and journalism and she was a really great feminist thinker and she was very funny too. Oh, and she had an affair with H.G. Wells and had a kid by him, and, well, you know, she was quite something. You should check her out."

Here we were, checking her out on behalf of these future audiences, looking for the populist Rebecca, the firebrand Rebecca, Rebecca the wit, the Rebecca who would have been much more entertaining at those very same parties than I could ever be. Our mission was to root her out in her reviews, essays, unpublished works and even

marginalia from the library of her books I didn't know the university had. Gosh, there is a lot of Rebecca on the fourth floor of the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa. You enter through a ragged lobby that is being redone and smells of concrete dust, then ascend in an elevator lined with depressing municipal metal of a caramel hue into a dusty upper corridor with shoddy carpeting and bad lighting that leads to an electronically locked glass door with painted letters on it, redolent of the cinematic office of a declining gumshoe.

But once through the door, you enter a great paneled room that is mostly full of Rebecca. Rebecca's library of books. Even pieces of Rebecca's furniture I recognized from my childhood visits to her. Trawling through great file folders full of lists, I busied myself with finding her previously uncollected book reviews, most of them for the UK paper, *The Telegraph*, but some going back to the days of *The Freewoman*. The library staff brought them up from unseen vaults in great, grey cardboard box files that may have remained untouched for decades.

It seems a knuckle-chewing shame that these pieces were published only once and then left to posterity. Some of them, most of them, are memorably good. Many of them are laugh-out-loud funny. All of them do more than inform and entertain: they seem to transmit some living piece of brain activity from her mind into yours. After a couple of days of immersion in these archives, I almost felt I was channeling Rebecca. Emails I dashed off to friends in far flung places received delighted responses congratulating me on my wit. I felt I was breathing a richer, more intelligent air, sitting there in the intimate company of one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. Ann Norton, Bernard Schweizer, Debra Rae Cohen and myself made frequent, squirrely dashes across the heavily serious library, animated with repressed laughter, to nervily point to a phrase or passage. Sometimes, we couldn't help ourselves, and read out loud, and laughed out even louder.

"Nabokov," she declared, "has a habit of constructing his novels on the same pattern as the mandrill, with the parts devoted to sexual activities far too extensive and highly coloured."

In reviewing the book *Treason* in the Twentieth Century by Margret Boveri, she snaps: "It is not that Dr. Boveri is a fellow-traveller. That she could not be called, for her mind never makes a definite advance in one direction rather than another."

"She wasn't always being waspish, though. Here's a gem from her review of the life of the dancer, Njinsky, by Richard Buckle: "The climax of [Njinsky's] art was the great jump. He leaped high into the air, and there he stayed, for what seemed several seconds. Face and body suggested that he was to mount still further, do the Indian rope trick with himself as rope, hurl himself up into space through an invisible ceiling, and disappear."

"But then he came down—and here was the second miracle—more slowly than he had gone up. Landing as softly as a deer clearing a hedge onto snow."

And then there is the wonderful feeling of witnessing a great mind approaching profundity, not by lumbering about some huge solemn subject matter, but instead addressing a topic that's apparently trivial and drawing from it the most astonishing and overarching clarity about the human lot. Here she is, for example, on film stars:

"One is at first revolted by the spectacle of people all over England and America obsessed by a group of people with whom they have no personal contact whatsoever, and who, for the most part, stand for no kind of achievement...It seems an energetic gesture into the inane..."

But, then one perceives that this curious behaviour is accompanied by an immense deal of passion, so much that something important must lie beneath. Few religious journals ever attain the degree of emotion at which the film fan magazines perpetually boil...Here is worship, here are gods and goddesses: Diana, Adonis, Apollo, Mercury and Vulcan, not so idyllically presented as in the past, but conserving their essential quality.

Monotheism, after all, is a spiritual achievement that demands a certain degree of complex power. The simpler people find polytheism a necessity. Instead of recognizing the qualities that are divine and fusing them into an object of worship, they prefer to take one by one the qualities that they

recognize in themselves and objectify them in single figures.

It is not a happy life, that of these modern gods; it is too dangerous. For a time they are stuffed with lollipops, but there is a disposition, whenever human beings are deputed to enact the parts of the immortals, to make them pay for it by exaggerating their mortality. The Aztec youths chosen to be gods lived but a year; and the Hollywood gods live not much longer."

In the evenings, we retired to the Tulsa Days Inn suite of rooms we'd rented (ever conscious of budget), and cooked and opened bottles of wine, and shared treasures gleaned and then transferred to our laptops, and laughed and talked late, mostly of Rebecca, but also of our own lives and experiences. Something about Rebecca's expansive intellectual fearlessness made the whole world seem a digestible feast if only one could take it a bite at a time.

I, for one, am greatly looking forward to helping produce a collection of her work that will allow anyone immediate access to this state of mind. It ought to be prescribed by doctors.

— Helen Macleod