



WEST WORDS

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ON TEACHING WEST'S BLACK LAMB AND GREY FALCON

As do many of us who want our undergraduates to benefit from Rebecca West's artistry and intellect, I have taught her novel *The Return of the Soldier* a number of times in my classes on British modernism. I suspect the reasons behind my choice of this book are shared by other instructors. First, it invites productive comparison to any number of contemporaneous modernist novels—what a “snug fit,” for instance, nestled between D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf! Second, its concise plot and relative brevity afford well-focused class discussion, so that students can walk away with a greater confidence that they now “possess” the story's meanings than they often do with, say, the (wonderful) sprawl of *Women in Love*. I have found that *Return* is a dream to teach.

That having been established, I decided last fall that it was time to place a different challenge before my upper-level students. On the syllabus for my “British Women Modernists” seminar there appeared for the first time a tome called *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. It did not supplant *Return*, which was also present there, but, at roughly 1150 pages (in the Penguin edition—a hefty doorstop), it certainly took up more of the semester's calendar. In addition to West's texts, the course focused in equal measure on two Woolf novels and a score of Katherine Mansfield stories. Late in the semester, after the students had become familiar with all three writers, we “tackled the mountain,” reading four sections and the “Epilogue” of *Black Lamb*, in addition to Christopher Hitchens' remarkable 2007 introduction to the Penguin edition. All together, these portions added up to a total of 401 pages of reading, just over a third of the book.

A brave group, the students approached West's *magnum opus* (having learned the meaning of this useful term!) with more pride

than apprehension, enjoying the attention of fellow undergraduates in other classes, who oohed and aahed over the heft of this tome being hauled around. Evidently, reading West's book encouraged my students to consider themselves members of an elite cadre—kind of like literary Navy SEALs—amid the English and Humanities majors. I did nothing to discourage their high self-opinion.

To help these undergrads manage their writing responses to so many pages of dense material, I told them first to concentrate on one of West's historical axioms or extended metaphors, and to base their first of two 750-word essays on close analysis of the way in which West organizes the fine-grained details of centuries of Balkan history within her patterning tropes. Each student chose his/her favorite aphoristic quotation for scrutiny; e.g., “It is sometimes very hard to tell the difference between history and the smell of skunk,” or “it should be admitted that governors are inferior to those whom they govern...for it is the truth that we are not yet acquainted with reality and should spend our lives in search of it,” etc. By limiting the essay to a close reading of the text in the immediate vicinity of the selected dictum, each student succeeded in articulating an aspect of West's historical vision.

For their second short essay, students examined a passage selected from West's hundred-page narrative of the historical currents, both personal and world-historical, that flowed into the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and thereby started the war. One student deftly analyzed the purple passage in which West foreshadows the future slaughter in the trenches through the blood-lust of Ferdinand in his youthful hunting frenzy; another did a great job of analyzing West's darkly comic technique in the farcical depiction of Gavrilo

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—Caroline Krzakowski (New York University)

UPDATE FROM THE REBECCA WEST ESTATE

We have had an exceptional couple of years in terms of getting Rebecca’s work out to readers all over the world, in several languages, and I’m delighted to report that the National Portrait Museum is going to issue a postcard of the Wyndham Lewis portrait of Rebecca. Amusingly, the quote they asked permission to use was, predictably the “feminist” one, but they’d ended it with “doormat.” I rectified it to include the crucial “or a prostitute.” They expressed surprise at not having heard this version before. I’ve noticed this happening a lot with this seminal Rebecca quote. Is it a sign of the times? I wonder.

In any case, back to the unstoppable tide of Rebecca publications across the known world, aided in great part by the tireless and creative efforts of our wonderful new agent at PFD in London, Camilla Shestopal, to whom we are greatly indebted.

A Train of Powder has been translated into Spanish and published by Reino de Redonda. *The Fountain Overflows* has been translated into Italian and published by Mattioli, who are also publishing “Indissoluble Matrimony” and “I Regard Marriage with Fear and Horror.” Perhaps most exciting is the news that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* has been translated into Mandarin and is being published by the Chinese publisher, Shanghai.

A dizzying number of other publications on foreign presses:

Brazil (Portuguese language)

- *The Return of the Soldier* - Geracao Editorial Ltda

Germany

- *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* – Klaus Bitterman Verlag

Italy

- *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* – EDT/ Musica
- *The Fountain Overflows* – Mattioli
- *The Thinking Reed* - Mattioli
- *The Return of the Soldier* - NeriPozza

Serbia

- *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* – Mono and Manana

- *The Meaning of Treason* – Algoritam Ltd

Spain

- *Survivors in Mexico* - Historia para Todos, S.A. de C.V.
- *The Meaning of Treason* - Editorial Reino de Redonda
- *The Return of the Soldier* - Herces Editores
- “Indissoluble Matrimony” (short story) – Zut Ediciones
- *The Birds Fall Down* and *The Strange Necessity* – Planeta
- *The Return of the Soldier* (Catalan) – Viena Ediciones

On top of all this, Virago brought out splendid new editions of *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Fountain Overflows*, adding to their current offerings of *This Real Night*, *Cousin Rosamund*, *Harriet Hume*, *Sunflower*, *The Judge* and *The Harsh Voice*. Canongate, in my home town of Edinburgh, is keeping in print its superb version of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, with a foreword by Geoff Dyer, who has a great deal more of relevance to say about Rebecca and her work than the loathsome Christopher Hitchens (may the gods rest his soul).

Rebecca is available in audio, too, now. We signed a big contract with Audible in September last year for download-only versions of *Cousin Rosamund*, *Harriet Hume*, *Sunflower*, *The Fountain Overflows*, *The Harsh Voice*, *The Judge*, *The Return of the Soldier*, and *This Real Night*, to be read by Harriet Carmichael, Imogen Church and Lucy Scott – all solidly good actresses.

Meanwhile, e-Books, under the constantly enthusiastic ministering efforts of New York-based Open Road, have been selling like all get-out and have long ago out-earned the contract signed in 2011.

The Return of the Soldier continues to sell well, as does *The Fountain Overflows*.

The Return of the Soldier remains enduringly popular, despite being, to my mind, among the least of Rebecca’s achievements. In a world obsessed with *Downton Abbey*, shenanigans among the upper classes around WWI are of interest all anew, I suppose. It has

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

After serving as president of the Rebecca West Society for six years, I have decided to step aside and let somebody else take the reins of this organization. I am happy to say that our indefatigable vice-president and resourceful Rebecca West scholar, Ann Norton, has agreed to stand for election to president at the General Meeting in September. While I am looking forward to seeing the Society grow, galvanize scholarship, and raise the public profile of Rebecca West in the years to come, I also take this moment of transition as an opportunity to look back at the past 10 years of the Society’s existence. In that time, we have held 6 conferences (including this year’s event). These conferences are perhaps the best way to take the pulse of West studies and to discern any relevant trends and developments in relation to our object of study. Therefore, I have gone over all five past conference programs, and considered the talks lined up for this year’s event, to assemble a few simple statistics that may shed a revealing light on the course of Rebecca West studies.

First, I have divided all talks given at the 6 conferences into three basic categories, depending on their approach:

1. Discussions of specific works by Rebecca West. These talks study one (more rarely two or three) work(s) by Rebecca West.
2. Discussions of a theme. These contributions focus on a theme like music or constructions of masculinity or pacifism as reflected in West’s work in general.
3. Discussions of connections beyond West’s work. These presentations look at the relationship between Rebecca West and other writers and thinkers (say, the connection between Rebecca West and Elizabeth Bowen) or they compare specific works by West with works written by others (say, *The Return of the Soldier* and Ford’s *Parade’s End*).

Here is the distribution of talks at West conferences based on these three approaches:

	Works	Themes	Connections	Total
2003	14 (56%)	9 (36%)	*2 (8%)	25
2005	10 (48%)	7 (33%)	4 (19%)	21
2007	11 (50%)	7 (32%)	4 (18%)	22
2009	4 (16%)	*13 (55%)	7 (29%)	24
2011	*15 (72%)	3 (14%)	3 (14%)	21
2013	14 (52%)	5 (18%)	*8 (30%)	27

* Outliers are marked with an asterisk

Note: The distinction between “themes” and “connections” talks is not always straightforward, and occasionally some ambivalence pertains as to the correct classification, but by and large, the margin of error is low.

A few things stand out in this comparison chart. Generally, the percentage of talks discussing individual works by West has remained quite stable across the years, making up for roughly half of all conference talks (with the exceptions of 2009 & 2011). The other half of conference talks is split between thematic approaches and connection talks, with themes usually outperforming connections (with the exception of 2013).

There are a few outliers:

1. The most notable “anomaly” in the distribution of talks concerns the 2009 conference—the only conference not held in New York and the only conference organized by a non-Board member. At that conference, thematic approaches predominated (55%), with close analyses of individual works taking a backseat. If nothing else, this shows that the place and person of the organizer can significantly shape the direction of a given conference.
2. The pendulum swung to the other extreme at the following conference, in 2011, when the overwhelming preponderance of talks (72%) addressed individual works by West.
3. in 2003 connection talks rated very low (8%), which can be explained by the fact that the first conference was titled “Rediscovering Rebecca West,” and connections to other luminaries would therefore be considered of less importance.
4. 2013 marks the first time that connection talks clearly outnumber thematic approaches. A significant trend, as I will explain further down.

It gets even more interesting, in my view, when we scrutinize more closely **what works** were selected for the text-based treatments. Below is a ranking of the frequency with which certain texts appeared in the titles of conference talks:

1. *The Return of the Soldier*: 18
2. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*: 13
3. The Aubrey Trilogy: 7
4. “Indissoluble Matrimony”: 4

5. *The Strange Necessity*: 4
6. *The Judge*: 3
The Meaning of Treason: 3
The Birds Fall Down: 3

All other works scored anywhere between 0 and 2 mentions.

As one can see, this listing represents a canon of its own. What we are looking at is a reflection of the popularity that certain texts by Rebecca West have enjoyed with scholars and teachers in the past 10 years. Thanks in part to a sustained interest in modernism and Great War literature, and thanks, also, to its “teachability” and the ready availability of solid editions, *The Return of the Soldier* is the clear “winner” in terms of scholarly attention. However, this would not necessarily have been predicted in 2003, when only **one talk** addressed this novel! By contrast, *The Return of the Soldier* was the focus of no less than **five talks** at the 2011 conference and it will again be discussed by **six** presenters in September 2013. Talk about conspicuous ascendancy!

There’s no surprise about the “second place finish” of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, which continues to hold scholarly interest and appears to be far from exhausted as a subject of critical inquiry. The fact that the Aubrey trilogy ranks third overall does not surprise me, either, as I personally consider this series to be West’s best long fiction. The attention devoted to “Indissoluble Matrimony” again reflects that this text is widely available and that it segues nicely with discussions of the roots of modernism and its radical forms. The outlook for *The Strange Necessity* also appears to be bright, as this treatise of modernist aesthetic garners increasing interest. The somewhat more scarce mention of the next three works reflects precisely their precarious status on the periphery of what is currently considered the “canon” of West’s oeuvre. The fact that neither *Sunflower*, nor *Survivors in Mexico*, nor *The Sentinel* have come in for more than one single treatment each shows that these posthumously released works have had a hard time breaking into the “mainstream” of West scholarship. (Even among the works comprising the “Aubrey trilogy,” *The Fountain Overflows* receives almost all the attention, to the detriment of *This Real Night* and *Cousin Rosamund*). West’s posthumous works tend to be referenced in footnotes but have not been adopted as subjects of full-length investigations by a substantial number of critics. Other casualties of scholarly neglect are *The Harsh Voice* (2 treatments), *St. Augustine* (1 treatment), *Harriet Hume* (2 treatments), and

assorted journalistic works (2 treatments). The worst fate befell *The Thinking Reed*, one of West’s major novels at the time and exceptionally well received, yet not a single scholar has chosen it as the focus of a presentation to date.

And this brings me to one of my concerns for the future: I see a gradual lessening of the diversity of texts being examined by West scholars. Consider this: in 2003, the 14 talks focusing on works by West addressed **13 different texts**, to wit: *Sunflower*, *The Return of the Soldier*, *The Fountain Overflows*, *The Birds Fall Down*, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (2 talks), “Indissoluble Matrimony,” *This Real Night*, *The Sentinel*, *Survivors in Mexico*, *The Strange Necessity*, *St. Augustine*, *A Train of Powder*, and *The Judge*.

In 2011, scholars gave 15 work-specific talks, but now they targeted only **7 different texts**, namely, *The Return of the Soldier* (5 talks), *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (4 talks), and *The Judge*, “Man and Religion,” “The Abiding Vision,” *The Meaning of Treason*, and *A Train of Powder* (1 talk each). At the coming conference, which shapes up to be the largest in our Society’s history, work-specific talks will address **only 6 different works**, all of them the “usual suspects.” Essentially, the diversity of texts under scrutiny has dropped 50% since 2003!

I am ambivalent about this situation: on the one hand, it signals that West’s oeuvre has undergone the shaping process and prioritizing that any artist’s canon is likely to undergo at the hands of scholars and writers, and it may even be beneficial to West’s standing if there is a more clearly defined “short list” of her works to guide neophytes. On the other hand, I fear that narrowing our focus to *The Return of the Soldier*, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, and *The Fountain Overflows* might impoverish Rebecca West scholarship in the long run.

Ultimately, I think we need to stop narrowing our vision vis-à-vis West’s multivalent oeuvre because it is precisely the variety and heterogeneity of her work that makes our author so unique and interesting. Thus, I would like to make a plea: let us dig up these “forgotten” works by West, let us tear into *The Thinking Reed* or *The Birds Fall Down* or the splendid essays collected in *The Essential Rebecca West*! Why not embrace the posthumous canon? How about going back into the archives and snooping around in West’s superb journalistic output?

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WEST IN THE NEWS

Louise Adler, in her April 27, 2013, review in *The Weekend Australian* of Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, muses on the sometimes hostile reactions the book has elicited. Here's her misquote of West's most famous quote. "The assumption behind the criticism, almost entirely from other women, is that a successful woman simply could not be genuine in advocating women seize control of their lives. Given the animosity, one cannot help but wonder what Sandberg had to gain from writing this quintessentially American, at times excessively upbeat, 21st-century feminist manifesto. Feminism has never been a vote-winner. As writer Rebecca West pointed out way back in the early 20th century: 'I am called a feminist every time I offer an opinion that differs from a doormat.'" Review, p. 18.

In the April 21, 2013, *International Herald Tribune Sunday Magazine*, Katie Roiphe muses on why "intelligent, right-on women buy ridiculously expensive shoes," claiming "it's complicated." "You've read the philosophy of Adorno. You're able to think critically about your desire for the shoes. Furthermore, you have a healthy class hatred for people who dress habitually in clothes from the store, and have a sense that it's wrong for things to cost this much in a world in which there are people who can't afford a bowl of rice." Moreover, "You can't . . . see Janet Malcolm or Susan Sontag wasting 40 minutes of their mental energy on these particular shoes. The fierce and wonderful feminist critic Rebecca West penned a series of articles critiquing women's desire for what she called 'elegance' in *The New Republic* in 1916. In the midst of her scathing self-examination, she wrote, 'I would waste on personal ends vitality I should have conserved for my work.' She was talking about a particular purple satin dress and the frivolous freelance articles she'd take on to pay for it, rather than focusing on reading and thinking and art." Complicated, indeed! P. 27.

In her review of *A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* by Therese Anne Fowler in the April 21, 2013, *New York Times Book Review*, Penelope Green quotes West on Zelda. "The pivotal plot point is the bromance between Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Although Zelda was never universally beloved (Rebecca West recalled how she 'flapped her arms and looked very uncouth as she talked about her ballet ambitions'), Hemingway took a particular dislike to her, and Ms. Fowler imagines cause and effect with a scene in which a boorish Hemingway comes on to Zelda and she rebuffs him, insulting his manliness." P. 16.

Lorna Gibb's new biography *West's World: The Life and Times of Rebecca West* received much attention (congratulations, Lorna!) and occasioned interesting reflections on West. Here's Anne Chisholm from the March 31, 2013, *Sunday Telegraph*. "Rebecca West, the writer and journalist born Cicely Fairfield in 1892, has been an irresistible subject for biographers since her death in 1983. Her talent was prodigious, her journalism outstanding and her private life full of drama.

She left much revealing personal material behind, but she has proved a curiously intractable subject, a brilliant, demanding woman it is hard not to admire but also hard to like . . . Even so, West's story is well worth retelling, not least because her personal and professional struggles, as an independent-minded woman, have proved both an inspiration and a warning ever since . . . In the end, though, the imperfections of a writer's life, the juicy fodder biographers and their readers enjoy, count for little; what matters is whether the work will last. Rebecca West, as a chronicler of her time, has few equals." Features, p. 27.

Bel Mooney ruminates on "the real meaning of Easter" in the March 30, 2013, *Daily Mail*. "The image of the cross towers over Western civilisation. With the joyful Nativity (complete with riotous angels in the sky) and the sombre sweetness of the Madonna and Child, it is an essential part of our consciousness. Even a questioning intellectual like the great writer Rebecca West understood this. She wrote: 'Jesus of Nazareth sits in a chamber in every man's brain, immovable, immutable, however credited or discredited.'"

Kathleen Byrne, in her *Globe and Mail* March 23, 2013, review of A.B. Yehoshua's novel *The Retrospective*, begins with another of West's more quoted ideas. "In one of the sweeping statements she was famous for, Rebecca West declared that women were idiots, the word 'idiot' from the Greek, meaning private person - the implication being that women are too bogged down in domestic affairs to see the big picture. Far less frequently quoted is the second half of the statement: that men, suffering the opposite defect - lunacy - are lunatics; obsessed by public affairs, they view the world as by moonlight, seeing only the outline and never the details of things. I was reminded of this reading Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua's *The Retrospective*, an overlong though weirdly intriguing treatment of clashing aesthetic visions and the two men who embody them. Here Great Artists butt heads over Great Issues, overlooking the human 'details' and completely missing the point." Book Review, p. R14. Do you think she's right, West scholars, that people remember the "idiot" and forget the "lunatic" part of this quote?

Catherine Jinks, in the February 24, 2013, edition of the Sydney *Sun Herald*, talks about books that changed her, like George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*. "This was a gateway book—an introduction to top-grade journalism. I graduated to other Orwell classics (including *Homage to Catalonia* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*) and then to Rebecca West's *A Train of Powder*, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Jon Krakauer, Sebastian Junger, Helen Garner . . . There's nothing quite as exciting or moving as the very finest literary non-fiction." Books, p. 14.

Pulitzer-prize winning author Katherine Boo (*Behind the Beautiful Forevers*), in an interview published in the February 10, 2013, *New York Times* Book Review, says that as a child, she

appreciated books in which "the weak were rarely bullied for long, and the bad guys didn't get away." Here's her answer to which reading assignments she would give to an aspiring journalist. "Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*; Anna Funder's *Stasiland*; Barbara Demick's *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*; Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's *Random Family*; Philip Gourevitch's account of the Rwandan genocide; Joe Sacco's graphic reportage; *The Corner*, by David Simon and Ed Burns; and Denis Johnson's nonfiction collection *Seek*, mainly for the piece about trying to meet Charles Taylor during the Liberian civil war. I could go on and on, but I'd probably end the list with Kathryn Schulz's *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*. It's about the animating power of doubt and correction, and a lack of self-certainty is something my favorite nonfiction writers seem to have in common." Again I ask you a question, scholars: would you, could you characterize West as lacking self-certainty? Books, p. 14.

The January 1, 2013, edition of the London *Times* reprinted this January 1, 1942, letter to the editor as part of their "Books in Wartime" series. "Sir, The apathetic disrespect shown by successive Governments towards letters and men of letters has been one of the safeguards of freedom of expression. It is now, in the circumstances of this war, robbing this freedom of any significance. Unless authority suffers a change of mind, the condition of letters in this country will be quickly past prayer. Any who think that this defeat at home will have no effect on the course of the war do not realize the extent of their folly. In a war of ideas and machines it is folly to let half your line of defence founder from neglect. Books and the book trade are not merely another industry. They are the daily food of our mental and spiritual life. The steps which it is necessary to take to avert breakdown do not involve any disturbance of the war effort. Only a few reservations of personnel are needed. 'Books in all their variety offer the means whereby civilization may be carried triumphantly forward.' The speaker is Winston Churchill. We are, Sir, yours faithfully, Laurence Binyon; Edmund Blunden; Bonamy Dobree; T. S. Eliot; E.M. Forster; Philip Guedalla; Storm J.B. Priestley; Ernest Rhys; G. Bernard Shaw; Osbert Sitwell; G.M. Trevelyan; H.G. Wells; Rebecca West." Letters, p. 20.

A.N. Wilson muses on the death of Rupert Murdoch's mother, who died on December 5, 2012, aged 103, in the December 9, 2012, edition of *The Independent*. "It was not an event that excited much comment in all the press, but those newspapers owned by the Dirty Digger carried respectful obituary notices. She was obviously a spirited old lady, who, said the obituarists admiringly, at the age of 99 won a case brought against her by the Australian Tax Office on a multimillion-dollar sum which she had inherited . . . It was left to Andrew Neil, former editor of *The Sunday Times*, to decree that she had had a 'good inning.' It's an interesting concept, the 'good innings' . . . From your own point of view,

and of those who love you - if there are any of them still left when you pass your 100th birthday, things might seem very different. I first warmed to Carmen Callil, the famously hot-tempered publisher, whom I had not then met, when someone told me that a colleague had walked into her office to find her in tears on the telephone. 'Why, what's the matter?' he had asked. Carmen said, 'I've just heard that Rebecca West is dead.' 'But,' said the other tactlessly, 'she was 90.' 'What FUCKING difference does that make?' screamed Carmen, hurling a large book across the room. Good reply."

In the December 1, 2012, edition of *The Daily Mail*, advice columnist Bel Mooney replies to a letter asking advice about marriage. First "Carol" describes that at 20 she married "a serial adulterer, gambler and raging alcoholic" with whom she had three children in a thirty-year hell. Now she lives with a man who is "kind and loyal," who dotes on her daughter, and who is everything her first husband was not. She's not content, though: "I know I should be grateful for meeting someone so decent who is prepared to take on a 12-year-old child who isn't his. But there are things I don't feel I can tell him, and things I can't ask. Should I persevere with the relationship and hope that all these uncertainties can be worked through? Or should I cut and run and face the prospect of a future on my own?" Bel gives it to her straight: "Sometimes I read a letter like this and pace my office in sheer frustration. I'm reminded of a famous insight from the writer Rebecca West: 'Only part of us is sane; only part of us loves pleasure and the longer day of happiness . . . The other half of us is nearly mad. It prefers the disagreeable to the agreeable, loves pain and its darker night despair . . .' Which is to say that occasionally I'm faced with a letter from somebody who is willfully and bizarrely choosing to be unhappy, turning from the light and warmth of home to gaze out on the bleak wastes outside. Madness indeed."

In the November 16, 2012, edition of *The International Herald Tribune*, Stephen Kinzer compares David Petraus, who had just resigned, to Allen Dulles, the C.I.A. director from 1953 to 1961. "Both men ran the C.I.A. during some of its most active years, Dulles during the early Cold War and Petraeus during the era of drone strikes and counterinsurgency operations. And both, it turns out, had high-profile extramarital affairs. But private life for a C.I.A. director today is apparently quite different from what it was in the Dulles era. Petraeus resigned after admitting to a single affair; Allen Dulles had, as his sister, Eleanor, wrote later, 'at least a hundred' . . . His affairs were legendary. The writer Rebecca West, asked once whether she had been one of his girlfriends, famously replied, 'Alas, no, but I wish I had been.'" Edit, p. 9.

In the October 8, 2012, edition of *The International Herald Tribune*, M.G. Lord reviews Lisa Cohen's *All We Know: Three Lives*. The book "concentrates on three tastemakers who were active during the first two-thirds of the 20th

century: Esther Murphy, Mercedes de Acosta and Madge Garland. Although all weathered marriages to men, they preferred the erotic company of women . . . Garland was a monument to productivity. In the early 1920s, with her life partner and fellow British *Vogue* editor Dorothy Todd, known as Dody, Garland transformed the magazine, as Rebecca West put it, 'from just another fashion paper to being the best of fashion papers and a guide to the modern movement in the arts.' Todd and Garland published Virginia Woolf, Duncan Grant and other Bloomsbury figures. Woolf associated the couple, Ms. Cohen writes, with 'the knot of art, commerce and sexuality that haunts and defines both modernism and fashion.'"

Stuart Kelly recalls the "lively origins" of the Edinburgh Writers' Conference in the August 11, 2012, edition of *The Guardian*. "Among the luminaries attending the conference were Angus Wilson, Rebecca West, Henry Miller, Rosamond Lehmann, LP Hartley, Lawrence Durrell and Stephen Spender; a proper mixture of the Establishment, the experimental and the censored . . . Rebecca West got things off to a fine and contentious start by declaring that 'the novel has suffered a lot from bad criticism. It wouldn't matter if most of the critics now writing had been strangled at birth.' Angus Wilson was equally forthright: 'The English novel is essentially middle-class, a novel on the defensive, conservative, attempting to protect the English way of life, the English country way of life, against town life and against cosmopolitanism. By nature it is defence of English roots, a discussion of what is right and wrong in terms of manners, not of good and evil in terms of metaphysics.' That said, there was equal outrage when William Burroughs described his new 'cut up' and 'fold in' method, where pages from different books were collaged together to form new works . . . The future of the novel lay in space, not time . . . The debates were prescient: how will technology change literature? . . . The 1962 conference took place in the shadow of the cold war: but what might commitment mean now? From Tahrir Square to the Occupy Movement, technology is reshaping political commitment and activism; the swords may be bent, but not yet into ploughshares. Writers engaging in a global discussion of these issues may not come up with the answers, but they might formulate the powerful questions." Review, p. 4.

Frances Stonor Saunders reviews Daniel Pick's *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts* in the August 4, 2012, edition of *The Guardian*. The book describes how "Hess was to spend the rest of the war under close observation as a rare live specimen of that elusive quarry, 'the Nazi mind' and how 'psychoanalysis was harnessed to political thought about Nazism, and the legacy of that encounter . . . [Hess,] by the time of the Nuremberg trials, had become a bundle of tics and contortions. Psychiatrists for the prosecution judged him to be sane enough to

stand trial, but many onlookers (and fellow defendants) were shocked by his psychic destruction. He was, Rebecca West wrote, 'so plainly mad . . . He looked as if his mind had no surface, as if every part of it had been blasted away except the depth where the nightmares lived.'" Review, p. 5.

Marie Chaix, author of the memoir *The Laurels of Lake Constance*, talks to Jessica Crispin in the July 31, 2012, *Kirkus* Features. Crispin also quotes West on idiots and lunatics. "After the liberation of France, the hunt for collaborators began almost immediately. And the hunt was a bloody one. . . [the book] deals with both the impulse to collaborate and the impulse to shame. Her father was a collaborator during the war, a Fascist who decided to throw his lot in with the occupying force. It didn't look like they were going anywhere. But they did, and his daughter Marie is forced to reckon with her father's past and the decisions he made during the war-not loyal, not noble." Crispin tells Chaix, "While reading the book, I kept thinking of Rebecca West's line about how the female defect is that 'intent on their private lives, women follow their fate through a darkness deep as that cast by malformed cells in the brain.' And that for men, '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.' Certainly in [your] family the lines were drawn that way for the men and for the women as things begin . . ." Chaix replies, "Rebecca West's view of the roles of women and men was certainly valid in the society in which [my parents] married. But I've never felt that my mother was indifferent to her husband's activities and absorbed in domesticity. She lived, in fact, in a state of perpetual anguish over the mystery of his repeated absences and his visible obsession with politics. It was Albert who deliberately and steadfastly kept her, and his children, in the dark about what he was doing . . ."

Gregory Cowles, in the July 1, 2012, edition of the *New York Times Book Review*, talks about Alan Furst's *Mission to Paris*, which includes this top-ten list of Furst's favorite books. West keeps very good company here.

1. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, by T. E. Lawrence.
2. *A Dance to the Music of Time*, by Anthony Powell.
3. *Man's Fate*, by Andre Malraux.
4. *Nightwood*, by Djuna Barnes.
5. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, by Rebecca West.
6. *Darkness at Noon*, by Arthur Koestler.
7. *Red Cavalry*, by Isaac Babel.
8. *Homage to Catalonia*, by George Orwell.
9. *The Radetzky March*, by Joseph Roth.
10. *Kaputt*, by Curzio Malapa

—Ann Norton (Saint Anselm College)

SO YOU SO YOU THINK YOU CAN EDIT: AN ADVENTURE IN FACULTY-STUDENT COLLABORATION

A few years ago, I taught an English graduate class on “Methods in Research and Criticism,” and for the final course project, I assigned an innovative task: I divided my class of sixteen M.A. students into four groups, asking each group to choose a short literary work from the syllabus in order to produce a mock-critical edition of the text, complete with scholarly apparatus, introduction, notes, and bibliography. Although the assignment was straight-forward (we had analyzed different kinds of critical editions during the course) and although the distribution of tasks was clear, three of the four groups did not manage to settle into productive working units. The collaborative spirit was lacking, and problems among group members quickly escalated. My expectations with regard to the students’ level of maturity, responsibility, and motivation may have been set too high. As one colleague advised me, I should have “baby-stepped” them through the process of collaborating. In any case, three of the four groups experienced problems ranging from open dysfunction to cheating and incompetence. Only one group came through with a solid product—a nice, theoretically-oriented edition of Rebecca West’s first novel *The Return of the Soldier*. Since no critical edition of this text existed yet, I proposed that the students work with me to bring the project to publication.

This was several years ago, and thus before the onset of the current recession. The future for M.A. students looked brighter back then compared to now. Despite a rosier job outlook, I fully expected that all of my four most promising students would jump at the opportunity of editing a book with me. After all, it was a great chance to garner real experience in publishing and a stepping stone for a number of careers. As it turned out, my learning curve as a well-meaning mentor of graduate students’ professional development was only just beginning. What follows here briefly chronicles the vicissitudes of my project, a story that is both a cautionary tale and a testimony to the potential rewards of faculty-student collaboration in the humanities.

When I told four of my graduate students that I would work with them to bring their final course project from the “mock” to the “real” by publishing it as a textbook, the announcement was greeted with enthusiasm. It was understood that while I’d act as editor in chief, they would all be represented as equal contributors in an editorial collective, and their names would feature on the cover. But when it became clear that I required substantial revisions and changes before I would even start writing a book proposal, one group member called it quits.

LESSON ONE

Not all graduate students are willing partners in their teachers’ professionalization schemes. At least, the remaining three jumped into the breach and completed the required revisions and corrections within a few months. At that stage, I invited several fellow Rebecca West scholars to act as external readers of the draft version of the edition. Their feedback coincided with the Third International Rebecca West Conference in New York, in September 2007, to which I invited the graduate students as participants in a round-table dedicated to presenting the edition. I was pleased with their professional demeanor, and it seemed evident to all that my graduate students had taken a stake in this project and “owned” their share of it.

Buoyed up by the positive feedback at the conference and equipped with a host of constructive suggestions from the participants, I wrote a book proposal. After a few rejections, I approached Broadview Press, which signaled strong interest in the project. However, their contextual approach necessitated a wholesaler-conceptualization of our Bedford-style, theory-driven edition. The summer of 2008 was entirely consumed by this transformation process, but it was worth it. After an external review of the manuscript, Broadview Press offered a contract in December 2008. At this point, my group of three co-editors surprisingly shrunk to two, as one more member of the initial collaborative withdrew, citing work over-load and a looming thesis deadline as reasons.

LESSON TWO

The staying power of graduate students through a long-term project cannot be taken for granted.

But my pool of co-editors was to shrink even further. After a few months of intensive work on this edition—incorporating the feedback from the external readers, gathering the complicated apparatus of textual sources and visual documents, honing the interlocking mosaic of the appendices, rewriting the general introduction, and composing numerous contextual head-notes—I was increasingly haunted by the conviction that one of the two remaining collaborators was not up to the task. Despite encouragement and close supervision, there was no learning curve, the conceptual input was lacking, and mistakes proliferated. It wasn’t for lack of trying on the collaborator’s part. Simply, the person didn’t have the necessary skills to be an editor.

LESSON THREE

Some graduate students who perform well in class will not cross the threshold into real professionalism, despite dedicated faculty mentoring.

Although faculty-student collaboration amounts partly to an extension of the faculty’s educational mission, and although mentoring is a crucial aspect of such an endeavor, there comes a point when “baby-stepping” is no longer a viable option for dealing with junior members of a project. Collaboration is not only a matter of mutual respect, team-spirit, and effort; it is also simply a matter of individually meeting a minimal standard of professional competence. And this rather intangible aspect is, of course, the Achilles heel for faculty-student collaboration. Ultimately, incompetence cannot be rewarded with endless patience, or else I would be condoning precisely the kind of free-riding that had caused so much rancor during the initial stage of collaborative work among my graduate students. So, although it was definitely not well received, I had to say goodbye to one more collaborator, un-inviting her from the project.

I was now left with one former graduate student—Charles Thorne—as my collaborator to finish the edition. His work had been outstanding throughout the whole process. He had immersed himself in Rebecca West like a scholar and had read deeply and widely. He even asked me to provide him with original documents from the archives. He made several deep dives in Henry James, Marcel Proust, D.H. Lawrence, and Wyndham Lewis studies to trace the hidden connections between their literary approach and that of West. He put his considerable knowledge in literary history, particularly modernism, to good use in drafting a section of the edition’s introduction. Besides, he re-conceived the selections of modernist poems and paintings that would serve as contextual appendices in the edition. When I did not agree with some of his selections, I would ask for a detailed rationale why he had made his choices, and he would unfailingly provide a closely reasoned, intelligent answer. For instance, when I questioned his inclusion of T.S. Eliot’s “Gerontion” as a companion piece to West’s novel, he not only explicated the thematic links between the two texts but provided a larger rationale:

As I said in a previous email, I have absolutely no idea how to construct a context section that includes poems but does not include Eliot. Like it or not, he is the towering figure of High Modernism as his importance is more than thoroughly documented (both by those who love or loathe him). The truth of the matter is that West and Eliot have more in common than they do not. Where West and Eliot part company is, to me, in many ways political and her objections to him are probably not that different than Beckett’s (whose new collected letters mentions West by the way and in not such a flattering light...).

Note also the authoritative tone of his message. This is faculty-student collaboration at its best, i.e. beneficial to both parties. I had obviously succeeded in making my collaborator feel comfortable enough to address me as an equal, although he never crossed a line into unprofessional chumminess. Always correct and polite, he was at the same time firm and purposive. But while he was steadfast, he was not stubborn

either. Although he did not relish the idea of including selections of celebratory pro-war poetry (e.g. by Rupert Brooke and Jessie Pope) in addition to the profoundly disillusioned works of Owen, Sassoon, Jacob, etc., he did eventually relent on that point. Besides being intellectually gifted, resourceful, and dependable, my collaborator was also proactive. For instance, he quietly drew up a whole spreadsheet of permission contacts, complete with an overview of the legal status of the various copyright holders involved in the artworks we wanted to reproduce.

Even he had a learning curve, of course. When it came to proof-reading the galleys, I found some blunders in the section for which he had been responsible. Still, his response was immediate and professional. He took responsibility for the errors (e.g. the omission of a whole stanza) and redoubled his efforts to hunt down the last mistakes in a proof-reading session that seemed to be asymptotically approaching the necessary level of perfection. His apprenticeship was not free of glitches, but he demonstrated versatility, enthusiasm, hard work, and real professional growth precisely at times when he met the greatest challenges.

LESSON FOUR

When faculty-student collaboration works, it is a rewarding experience, both for the faculty member and the student. Indeed, my graduate students brought a fresh energy to the project and helped me to see a text I had known very well from new perspectives and in different contexts. For that I am grateful to all my collaborators, even those who had dropped out (their contributions are duly credited in the Acknowledgments). It was a protracted process, more unpredictable and far longer than the reality-show punned in the title. Indeed, it extended over almost four years; but the one graduate student out of 16 potential candidates who stuck it out to the end now does have a leg up on the competition: not only does he have a significant additional credential to his name, he also has a faculty mentor willing to further his career, not to speak of valuable professional experience and the thrill of having a book with his name on it.

—Bernard Schweizer

SIXTH BIENNIAL REBECCA WEST CONFERENCE

We eagerly anticipate the sixth biennial International Rebecca West conference, to be held at New York University September 21-22, 2013. At this writing, we have 27 speakers planning to participate, a record number! It’s not too late to attend if you can. It will be another memorable conference. Contact Ann Norton at anorton@anselm.edu for info.

Here’s the call for papers we issued.

REBECCA WEST: CELEBRITY, PUBLICITY, MEMORY

New York University, September 21-22, 2013

Centering on the contested and still-evolving reputation of Rebecca West, this conference explores the processes by which a celebrity writer passes into cultural memory. How have scholars selectively created their own Rebecca Wests? How do recent cultural representations reinforce or contest her reputation? How did West’s peers create or contribute to the memory of West? How did West’s manipulation of her own image affect the way she is remembered? How does the history of West’s celebrity—the shaping and misshaping of her image—compare to that of other writers and artists of her period? Are women writers, and West, remembered primarily in a gender context? How can we understand West in light of recent theorizing of modernist celebrity by critics such as Aaron Jaffe and Faye Hammill? And what does West’s work contribute to conceptualizing larger aspects of personal and cultural memory?

These questions, and others, can productively frame discussions of West’s fictional and non-fictional work. We also welcome abstracts on other topics related to West’s voluminous oeuvre. Faye Hammill will be the keynote speaker.

ANOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT CONTINUED

While the narrowing trend might be worrisome, I see another development that inspires me with confidence in the future of West studies. In my mind, the rising trend of connection studies reflects a salutary development. From a practical standpoint, conducting research that places West in touch with other writers and/or other works is perhaps the best strategy to increase our Society's impact, to appeal to a wider network of scholars, and to raise West's profile for "general" readers who might "discover" her via their interest in, say, George Bernard Shaw, or Ford Madox Ford, or Virginia Woolf. Bringing Rebecca West into the orbit and the "jurisdiction" of other figures in art, philosophy, and public life can have a significant "multiplication effect" with regard to West's visibility. It may, in the long run, be the best avenue to keep a single-author society such as ours alive and relevant. To give a boost to this type of relational research, the Board of the Society considers theming the next conference (in 2015) along the lines of "Rebecca West and her Connections," or "Networking West" (with all the punning overtones).

I myself am partial to this type of research, and I have a veritable wish-list of connections that I would like to see explored some day. On top of that list has been for some time now the connection (if any) between Rebecca West and Hanna Arendt, two moral thinkers and historical commentators of the first order who grappled with the big questions of human destiny and yet seemed to avoid each other. I am happy to say that my wish is about to be granted, as one paper at the upcoming West conference at NYU is indeed going to deal with just that fascinating pairing. There are many more points of contact between West and her contemporaries (as well as past thinkers and artists) that it would be fascinating to explore, and I look forward to many more interdisciplinary, relational, and generally enlightening treatments of our near inexhaustible subject—Rebecca West!

—Bernard Schweizer (Long Island University)

ON TEACHING WEST'S BLACK LAMB AND GREY FALCON CONTINUED

Princip and his bumbling associates on the fateful date of 28 June 1914. In class, the student read this final passage of the "Serbia" chapter aloud – and I will never forget how most of the ten students laughed along with him. I asked the class: "Did you ever think you would read an account of the event starting World War One that would make you laugh out loud?" A teachable moment if there ever was one.

While it is true that these readers of *Black Lamb* constituted an unusually sophisticated bunch, I believe my experience teaching it proves that if the instructor establishes the proper literary-historical contexts, West's masterpiece can provide students with a truly formative intellectual encounter.

—Marty Hipsky (Ohio Wesleyan University)

UPDATE FROM THE REBECCA WEST ESTATE CONTINUED

attracted interest from both an opera writing duo and a playwright, but neither has brought productions to fruition yet.

Meanwhile, as I pursue my own new career goals of being a screenwriter, I have made the first moves in getting a documentary about Rebecca made. No promises, but I have at least filmed Alison Macleod, as well as my parents, Marion and Norman Macleod, talking about Rebecca. There's a lot of work to do on this, but it seems utterly crazy that there is no documentary of even the most basic sort about Rebecca, and I thoroughly intend to rectify this.

Stay tuned. She's alive and well and living in more heads than she was last year.

—published by the Chinese publisher Shanghai Sanhui Culture and Press Ltd.

WEST WORDS

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