

## Syllabus Corner

Bernard Schweizer of Long Island University, Brooklyn, teaches West in three courses. In a British literature course that explores "a wide range of ideas about love (both sane and pathological) in British texts dating from 1850 to the present," students read *The Return of the Soldier*. (Other texts of note: Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and A.S. Byatt's *Possession*.) In "The Mexicos of Modern Mexican and British Writers," Schweizer teaches *Survivors in Mexico* (which, of course, he edited for publication). And in a graduate course on "Methods in Research and Criticism," his students work with *The Fountain Overflows* (along with Waugh's *Black Mischief*) as well as sources on West, feminism, and postcolonialism.

In Bonnie Kime Scott's "Foundations of Feminist Scholarship" (the introduction to graduate studies for MA students in San Diego State University's Women's Studies program), students read West's essay "A New Women's Movement: The need for Riotous Living." Scott teaches this as a representation of first-wave feminism.

Marina McKay, at Washington State University in St. Louis, teaches *The Return of the Soldier* in an upper-

level course on English modernist fiction. McKay explains that "it demonstrates how the validation of psychoanalysis has roots in an historical moment (the Great War), but also implies that the experience of that historical event can only be obliquely narrated." McKay also teaches *The Fountain Overflows* in a class on "Portraits of the Artist," which covers texts mostly from 1890-1930. She pairs it with Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as a "retrospective autobiographical novel about the modernist era."

Carl Rollyson teaches *The Fountain Overflows* at Baruch College in his British Literature survey course.

At Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, Ann Norton teaches *The Return of the Soldier* in a class on British literature from 1900-1936, connecting it particularly to the ideological divisions between "new" feminists and "equality" feminists. This spring she will teach *The Fountain Overflows* for the first time, in British literature 1936-present.



## WEST WORDS

The International Rebecca West Society Newsletter

Volume 2: Winter 2004-05

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### Joining the International Rebecca West Society

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."

### Mailing Address

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### Membership Fees

Regular: \$20 per year  
Couples: \$30 per year  
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## Onward

As a bitterly divided United States ponders the aftermath of the 2004 American presidential election, I yearn wistfully for Rebecca West to appear like Hamlet's father and explain to me clearly what happened and what to do next. I'm certain she would be funnier but no less pointed than that armored ghost. And I'm sure that somehow she would surprise us. There needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us this.

Politics aside, West has less need than ever to echo Hamlet Senior's exhortation, "Remember me." This has been a great year for Dame Rebecca and her readers. *that Woman: Rebecca West Remembers* has played in New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut, and plans for more productions of this play and other West words are in the works (see Helen Atkinson's wonderful essay within). West continues to be cited by journalists and reviewers all over the world, and West scholarship continues to grow.

I hope that you will rejoin this great writer's renaissance and attend the second Rebecca West conference in September 2005. Please look at the call for talks here and spread the word. — Vice President Ann Norton

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Ann's words about the recent election and about politics remind me of one of my favorite Rebecca West statements. Politics, she wrote, is often a question of voting for the candidate who is 30% right vs. the candidate who is 15% right. In other words, there is no 100% in politics.

It has indeed been a good year for West, and for those of us dedicated to her work. Not only will the play based on her writings continue to be produced, but also I am hoping West texts out of print can appear once again under the sponsorship of this society. In this new technological world of self-publishing, I am convinced that we can find ways to build a new readership based on our own re-issuing of her work. That, I hope, will be one of the discussions we have at our next conference. See you there! — President Carl Rollyson

## Call for Proposals

### The Second International Rebecca West Society Conference, September 2005

The International Rebecca West Society invites proposals for its second biennial conference, to be held September 2005 in New York City (exact dates and location to be announced). Given the success of informal, freely-delivered presentations at the last conference, we ask that participants give fifteen-minute talks rather than read papers (they may distribute papers after they speak if they wish).

Any topic will be considered, but here are some suggestions:

- West and the canon
- West and the academy
- West and her influences
- West's influence on twentieth-century writers
- Genres in which West wrote (fiction, travel, political/social journalism, book reviews, memoir, biography)
- West and the family romance
- West's views on gender and sexuality
- West and literary theory
- West in historical or literary context

Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words by March 15, 2005, to Ann Norton, Saint Anselm College, Box 1652, Manchester, NH 03102-1310, or email attachments to anorton@anselm.edu.

## NOTES AND QUERIES

The February 1, 2004 BBC magazine describes the unsuccessful attempt by NMC—a British record label that produces contemporary British music—to record Richard Rodney Bennett's "unabashedly romantic" score from the 1981 film *The Return of the Soldier* starring Julie Christie, Alan Bates, and Ann-Margaret. The score they had hoped to use was "riddled with inaccuracies," so they had to quit; and a Google search shows no recording of the soundtrack. Does anyone know if the soundtrack exists somewhere—besides the video, of course—on paper, or on record, tape, or CD?

In the West Collection at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa (I 33:6), there is an unfinished short story from the 1970s called "The

## THAT WOMAN: REBECCA WEST REMEMBERS

By Helen Macleod Atkinson October 27, 2004

There was a chill and a thrill in the air as I walked from Sixth Avenue's early-evening bustle and hum into the tree-lined intimacy of Washington Square, bristling with anticipation at the first night of *that Woman: Rebecca West Remembers*, last March. After much sterling effort from a variety of creative souls, Rebecca West finally came alive again on stage, almost exactly 21 years after her death, in a 50-seat theater in New York's Greenwich Village.

As it turned out, once we'd unleashed Rebecca's spirit into the corporeal world, she had no intention of dissolving back into the pure written word again.

The ten-performance run of this one-woman play, from March 3-13, 2004, at manhattantheatreresource on Macdougall Street turned into a huge success, and we were sold out for the majority of the run. This was partly because Jason Zinoman at *The New York Times* gave us a huge spread in the Sunday arts section (you can see it on the Rebecca West Society website, [www.rebeccawestsociety.org](http://www.rebeccawestsociety.org), under "News") with an extract from the play; a big photo of Rebecca and, next to it, one of Anne Bobby, the actress who played Rebecca and who helped me rewrite Carlollyson's original play *A Saga of the Century*.

Somehow, once in motion, the whole project was met with green light after green light. Carl, president of the International Rebecca West Society, and one of Rebecca's biographers, had written the play in 1996 shortly after he'd completed *Rebecca West: A Saga of the Century*, his compelling book biography of Rebecca. He reflects now that he was told at the time the play would never get performed until an actress took a personal interest in it.

Luckily, seven years later, the star of Broadway and both big and small screens, Anne Bobby, took a very real interest in Rebecca and the play, after my father, Norman Macleod, met her and suggested the connection. From the start, we felt good about Anne playing Rebecca. Although they are physically different, Anne and Rebecca share much, including a powerful intellect, forceful personality and agile wit, not to mention a desire to be on the stage. It helped, also, that Anne is a published writer and so could put herself in the shoes of a working writer.

We did a trial run of the play in its original form at the inaugural meeting of the International Rebecca West Society at the Mercantile Library in midtown Manhattan in September 2003, where it was well received. Carl, Anne and I, however, had bigger plans.

The list of benevolent connections now began to unfold. Anne had a good connection with Fiona Jones, manager of the manhattantheatreresource space, who was sold on the project almost immediately, chiefly because of her admiration for Anne's acting work. We went to visit her in December, and she offered us a ten-day run in March. Neither of us realized at the time that this was an unusually short lead-time for a play. But, fortunately, our ignorance protected us from it being a problem.

Our luck was boosted by the fact that, Paul Lucas, the mutual friend who had introduced Anne and me and also an up and coming theater producer, was available to take the project on. Paul put us together with

David Drake, a talented writer and actor and veteran of off-Broadway shows, including his long-running one-man show, *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*.

Coincidentally, David had been thinking for some time about placing a real life historical figure on the solo stage, so he agreed to direct this play before he'd even read the script – the combination of Anne and Rebecca was appealing enough all on its own.

Then Paul mobilized a team of his favorite theater people to help us put the production together – lighting, set design, technicians, publicity design, mailing houses. Anne brought in her friend Lars Hoel to help with scanning and presenting a series of photos of Rebecca and other important figures from her life, which played throughout the performance, as well as appropriate music, which Anne chose herself.

Pretty much everybody agreed to work for free. It was a classic case of the economics of creativity in New York – the really interesting stuff ends up paying peanuts but looks great on your resume. The stuff that pays is boring and recherché. I'm glad to say that, by the end of the run, and because of the generosity of both Kit Wright and Susan Hertog – who backed the play through contributions to The Society - we were able to move from "nothing" to "peanuts" at least.

The show was marvelous, as was the fact that it became a destination point for long-standing fans of Rebecca's, as well as those simply curious after reading *The Times*. We also got a full page in *The New York Sun*, after its editor, Seth Lipsky, attended a gala performance held to benefit The Society. We were also supported by the appearance of Edwin Frank, editor of the *New York Review of Books* book publishing division, which had recently published a colorful new edition of *The Fountain Overflows*. He and his assistant set up a handsome display stand in the foyer of the theater, from which we offered copies of *Fountain*, Carl's biography and Bernard Schweizer's excellently edited version of Rebecca's *Survivors in Mexico*.



A thrilling and unexpected member of the audience was Lily West, Anthony West's second wife, with whom I had a long conversation after the show. I think, considering the material, she was very gracious. She also prompted us three writers to think of adding material from Anthony's novel, *Heritage*, which is a mission we're all now working on. It may make for an even more dramatic tale when you hear a little of Rebecca's closest critic!

The truly magical moment was when I actually felt that Rebecca was standing in front of me on the stage. In an astonishing act of intuition, Anne made a gesture with her mouth just like Rebecca used to do - opening it into a big rectangle that represented, to me, both her ravenous curiosity and her need to muse, to speak, to pronounce judgment. I always thought of her mouth as a space wider than usual in the human face, through which information came both in and out in great quantities.

Rebecca's momentum seems now to be gathering. We had a two-performance run at the Arts Council in Greenwich, Conn., October 2-3, courtesy of funding by Kit Wright.

Then, in January, Anne will be playing Rebecca in Amsterdam and The Hague, the production managed by Xaveira Hollander (author of "The Happy Hooker"), who came to the New York production and loved it. We also have interest in Belgrade (the play is currently being translated into Serbian by prestigious author/journalist/poet Maya Herman-Sekulic), and Paul is eager to find a spot in London for it soon. With the BBC Radio dramatization of *The Fountain Overflows*, *My Cousin Rosamund* and *This Real Night* scheduled for broadcast nationwide in the UK for January 2006, there may well be enough public interest to fill a considerably bigger theater, and stage a more ambitious production.

All in all, this has been a thoroughly exciting time, and Carl, Anne and I are happily collaborating on how to make the play even more dramatic and memorable.

## Bibliographic Update

Look for an article by West Society member Francesca Frigerio in the 2002 Fall issue of *Journal of Modern Literature*: "Under Western Eyes: Rebecca West Reads Joyce."

Watch this fall for "Oscar Wilde and Feminist Criticism" by another member, Margaret Stetz, which will appear in *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, edited by Frederick S. Roden. Stetz discusses briefly West's opinion of Wilde as she charts feminist responses to Wilde throughout the twentieth century.

Also of note is the brief biographical sketch of Rebecca West in *Alone! Alone! Lives of Some Outsider Women*, a 2004 New York Review of Books volume by Rosemary Dinnage that examines "women who, by choice or circumstance, defiantly or sadly, stood outside the boundaries of the ordinary. . ." Dinnage titles the West essay "Almost Queenly," and it appears in the section called "Reinventors" (with Isak Dinesen, among others).

Barbara Green writes about "The New Woman's Appetite for 'Riotous Living': Rebecca West, Modernist Feminism, and the Everyday" in *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*, edited by Leslie W. Lewis, with an afterword by Rita Felski. Johns Hopkins UP, 2002.

## IN-PRINT WATCH

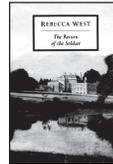
In her Carrol and Graf 2002 book *Hell Hath No Fury: Women's Letters From the End of the Affair*, Anna Holmes includes West's frantic 1913 letter to H.G. Wells that begins, "During the next few days I shall either put a bullet through my head or commit something more shattering to myself than death. . ." This letter, by the way, is one Anne Bobby brings to impassioned life in "that Woman: Rebecca West Remembers" (as you may remember from the first conference, if not from one of the



subsequent performances). Other tidbits include letters from Lady Hamilton to Greville, Earl of Warwick, and Madame de Staël to Chavalier Francois de Pange.

Justin Marozzi quotes West from *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in the July 17, 2004 issue of *The Financial Times*: "I can't bear Dubrovnik. . . I find it a unique experiment on the part of the Slav, unique in its nature and unique in its success, and I do not like it. It

reminds me of the worst of England." Marozzi disagrees: as he and his wife "stood high on the turrets of the Miniceta Fortress and stared across the city in a fading sunset. . . it was not the worst of England I was thinking about so much as the best of the Balkans."



In the September 9, 2004 *New Zealand Herald*, Deborah Coddington begins an article about a complex legal question concerning letter writing in a way that would make West chuckle: "Sir Robert Jones does it. Rebecca West and H.G. Wells were at it like rabbits. The Happy Hooker published details about the ones she had received. I'm talking about letter writing—an ancient art requiring pen, notepaper, and time to compose."

Magnus Linklater, writing in the October 1, 2004 *London Times* about the Hemingway bullfight story the author's heirs refuse to publish, defends the practice of issuing important writers' minor works and letters. Like so many journalists, he brings up West as a case in point and then can't resist quoting her: "Neither H.G. Wells nor Rebecca West have been toppled as literary icons, though their lives have been held up to unflinching scrutiny—or as Ms. West herself put it, subjected to biographers' picnicking around the tombstones of the newly dead, sucking the bones clean and flinging them over shoulders."

## Notes & Queries continued from page 1

Con Highjacker" or "The Man of the Age" that contains a delicious sentence, one worthy of inclusion in all the lists of West quotes available on the Internet: "What made a man an apostle of vice was the prospect of becoming rich. The sincere practitioner, who loves the vice for its own sake, stays at home and plays with his peculiar toys." Contact Ann Norton with notes/queries for future newsletters.