REBECCA WEST: A WORTHY LEGACY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Denton, Texas

May, 1989

Given Rebecca West's fame during her lifetime, the amount of significant and successful writing she created, and the importance and relevance of the topics she took up, remarkably little has been done to examine her intellectual legacy. Writing in most genres, West has created a body of work that illuminates, to a large degree, the social, artistic, moral, and political evolution of the twentieth century. West, believing in the unity of human experience, explored such topics as Saint Augustine, Yugoslavian history, treason in World War II, and apartheid in South Africa with the purpose of finding what specific actions or events meant in the light of the whole of human experience.

The two major archival sources for Rebecca West materials are located at the University of Tulsa's McFarlin Library, Special Collections, and at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Many of her works have been recently reprinted and those not easily available are found in the British Library or in the archival depositories noted
above. Interviews with persons who knew West were also an important source of information.

This dissertation explores chronologically West's numerous works of nonfiction, and uses her fiction where it is appropriate to place into context social, historical, or biographical topics. The manner in which she took up the topics of feminism, art, religion, nationalism, war, history, treason, spying, and apartheid demonstrate the wide-ranging mind of an intellectual historian and social critic.

Though her eclecticism makes her a difficult subject, the diversity of her mind and her talent in expressing her thoughts, allow her work to symbolize and illuminate twentieth century intellectual history. Known for her elegant fiction, and forceful personal style, West should also be known as a thinker and social critic. What is common to her eclectic opera is that she forcefully propounded ideas, shook loose staid preconceptions, and recommended new ways of perceiving politics, religion, art, culture, law, and morality.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE SETTING

Rebecca West was born into a world about to be thrust into a cyclone of change. Even the year of her birth, 1892, evidenced the rather uncomfortable mixing of the old and the new. William Gladstone became Prime Minister in England for the fourth time. He looked, West wrote years later, "like the stern and wise and honoured father everybody would like to have." In later years she could think of no leader since Gladstone who provided England with the certainty that there was someone there to take care of them. Indeed, what followed left many Europeans convinced that not only were their national leaders not wholly committed to their well-being but some, in fact, were committed to their destruction.

As though it were a challenge to the stale politics of the nineteenth century, 1892 saw the election of Keir Hardie, the first Labour member of Parliament. The Independent Labour Party, which officially organized the following year, 1893, arose from the attempt to alleviate the destructive forces of the Industrial Revolution.

through the positive policies of socialism. Labour intended to place the individual first, and to conduct matters of state and industry in a way that would maintain the dignity of the human being. The century went on to prove, however, that it is always easier to be in opposition than to be in power. Labour found the "halo of static moral superiority easier to obtain than the dynamic victories of statecraft."

Josep Broz-Tito was born in Croatia the same year Rebecca West was born in London. While she never met Tito he would inspire her to involvement in the historical process. Tito and the totalitarianism he imposed on Yugoslavia became to her the evidence of a dynamic system that was bent on the destruction of the elementary rights of man and thus the dignity of man. West was unrelenting in her opposition to this force, so much so, in fact, that later she would be accused of advocating the tactics of McCarthyism.

Rebecca West’s life was manifestly uncomfortable. At times she struggled to find life tolerable, though she never ceased trying to make sense of it. A woman of ideological passion, to whom casual opinions were

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foreign, she devoted much of her energy to adjusting to the changing reality of the twentieth century. While her formidable intellect provided her with a defensible platform, her extraordinary literary style granted her an audience. All her works represent her own researches into what, she believed, "actually existed"; into what was in fact the substance of life. Santayana said that one could start with any work of art or any natural object and infer the entire universe. Rebecca West attempted to do precisely that in her magnum opus, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia, in which she used the history of the Balkans to set down her thinking on art, politics, history, culture, religion, ethics, and law. In the same way, the particular experiences of this one woman in her attempt to grapple with the changing reality of her time infer the major changes of the twentieth century.

Samuel Hynes, "In Communion With Reality," first published in The Times Literary Supplement, says of West, "Indeed, one might propose that her achievement is not to be located in this book or in that one, but in the whole -- that her books combine to make one created work of art, the mind of Rebecca West." The present study

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intends to expose the wide-ranging and significant thought of Rebecca West. West used almost every written form during her long career. Her eclecticism stemmed precisely from the fact that life is eclectic. Were all truth derived from cooking, Rebecca West would have been a chief, and no doubt a good one. As it was, West believed, the sources of truth were as diverse as the universe itself. Thus, while attempting to set down what she knew and to discover what she should know, West found it necessary to explore fiction, literary criticism, travel pieces, history, journalism, and biography.

In some ways this has hurt her legacy, because she is difficult to categorize. Her fiction, judged by many to be outstanding, has not provided her with a secure position with those who study modern British fiction. Her historical works are recognized by historians as illuminating, though they are rarely given the place they deserve. As the trend in history moves towards valuing work in highly specialized areas, the appreciation of someone who inferred the universe from a portion of history becomes less esteemed. Worse yet, West was willing to, and perhaps gloried in making historical judgments. Her grasp of the importance of the human continuum made it essential that she understand the process of
history in an attempt to determine its effect on the present and the future. While on some occasions she proved faulty in her analysis, she was willing to risk judging why an event was important or dangerous or advantageous. She was willing to play the moralist and trouble over ethics in a period when strict analysis of facts was considered the historian's only proper sphere. As with almost everything concerning West, this tendency was a double edged sword, leading on some occasions to bizarre evaluations of both people and events.

West did her own legacy no favors. While the diversity of her work should enhance her status, it deters scholars who feel they are able to properly analyze only one area. On occasion she appeared discouraging to those interested in studying her and her work. At the same time she expressed bewilderment at what seemed to be a general tendency to ignore her. Nonetheless, the attitude expressed in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* concerning an attempt by a German student to write a thesis on her in the 1930s seems, to some degree, to have remained intact as well into the 1970s and 1980s. She said then she was a writer wholly unsuitable for the purpose of a thesis because "I had never used my writings to make a continuous disclosure of my own personality to others, but to discover
for my own edification what I knew about various subjects which I found to be important to me."“

Be that as it may, West did disclose her personality throughout her long career. To be sure, she often used a given book to create a forum in which she psychoanalyzed herself along with her subject. This creates an additional problem for the scholar who seeks to deal with her work without attempting a psychological profile of the author. West’s own personal motives factor in so prominently that at times a confusion is created for the reader trying to separate the author from the material. It is true, however, that the issues that were so personal to Rebecca West are universal in their relevance. Once the author’s personal entanglements with the material are identified, the topics she chose and the manner in which she deals with them take on a broad significance.

Whether in her personal or professional life West constantly grappled with the issues of good and evil, life and death, and fantasy and reality. She did not always attack those problems because she wanted to, but rather

because she felt that for man to be his best self, he must fight off the demons that haunt him. It may be said that for West her art was the arena in which she did battle with those elements that threatened her own life.

Perhaps to her own detriment, West viewed the very fact of her gender as a threat. Her intellect and talent placed her beside men in the professional world, yet she felt it barred her from some mystical bond experienced between men and women in the private sphere. This perception caused her great distress but did not stifle her professionally. She branched out topically throughout her career into areas considered strictly the domain of men. In so doing, she provided convincing evidence that women were fully human with extraordinary gifts. Rebecca West lived through the better part of a century that has seen phenomenal changes for both men and women, but particularly women. Yet with her own roots in the last century she became the embodiment of the twentieth century woman.

Despite her sometimes reluctant attitude, during her lifetime West received a considerable amount of literary attention. Numerous magazine, newspaper, and journal articles highlighted various aspects of her remarkable career. Those seeking interviews with her abounded because West could be counted on not to conceal her rather forceful and formidable opinions. As well,
monographs appeared in the 1970s and 1980s that presented brief synopses of her eclectic career. These monographs were evidence of one of the perennial difficulties in studying West. All of those who wrote about her came from a literary perspective that led them naturally to concentrate on her fiction. While it is true that works of fiction may be considered to be the one consistent form of literature that ran through her varied career, it need not necessarily be considered the most important or the most representative of her thought. Nevertheless, long chapters devoted to her novels seemed more common than analysis of her skills as an historian or political journalist. As it is difficult if not impossible to be an expert in every field, this literary concentration was quite natural for literary scholars. Very often, even those lay readers who were interested in following her magazine and newspaper articles were strained to conquer each of her diverse works as they were published. Those readers, moreover, who enjoyed West's Edwardian novels were not equally enthralled with an analysis of the impact of Saint Augustine on the mindset of modern man or interested in a focused view of Yugoslavian history

translated into a general statement on Western man. And vice-versa.

In the 1960s and 1970s, at least two excellent doctoral dissertations, written for English departments, were completed.* These again, quite naturally, focused on West’s novels with perhaps a brief word of acknowledgement that fiction was not her only interest. In addition, senior theses from Ivy League schools were written about West, but again, those who had discovered the wealth in her opera were those from literature and modern language departments. To their credit, the body of literature regarding West would be substantially reduced without their contributions. It is an understatement to say the time is overdue for scholars in other fields to examine the writings of Rebecca West.

Since West’s death in 1983, there has been a notable decrease in published works regarding her life and career. In 1987 Victoria Glendinning published a short biography of West, and filled a large gap in the literature of correct biographical information." Perhaps of


greatest importance is the effort by Virago Press of London to reissue many of West's works published earlier and to issue previously unpublished material from her estate. Before her death, West expressed "utter delight" with these paperbacks. With these exceptions and a single monograph, the body of published material about West since her death has remained vacuous. There is, therefore, plenty of need for scholars, especially those outside the field of literature, to examine the non-fiction of Rebecca West. The least that may be said is that she lead an extraordinary life during an extraordinary century. It is closer to completely accurate to say that Rebecca West was an extraordinary thinker and critic of this century. She was a first-rate historian because she blended the existing historical data with a seer's sense of what would matter in the future. These talents were combined and presented in such a beautifully literate package that the reader could never be certain which genre many of her works fit into. Her works of

®Rebecca West, London, to Jill Craigie (Mrs. Michael Foot), London, 19 September 1980, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

®This monograph is similar in nature and organization to the other monographs in print, but it does pay more attention to the non-fiction areas of West's literary output. It is the most complete study of her works to date. Harold Orel, The Literary Achievements of Rebecca West (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).
history and political journalism are worthy on their own merits. Add to that the numerous other genres West gave life to and the picture of this one woman becomes remarkably complex. It is the intention of this work to examine West’s non-fiction as she assumed the role of historian, social critic, and thinker. It may be easily contended that in this regard she has not received the credit she is due.

The two major archival sources for Rebecca West materials are located at the University of Tulsa’s McFarlin Library, and at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The collection at Yale University is the smaller and less significant of the two. The material in this collection was donated by Dame Rebecca during her lifetime, and includes copies of almost all of her published works including many that are difficult to find either in the United States or Great Britain. There is also, at the Beinecke, a small collection of West’s correspondence. The most numerous letters included are those between West and G. Evelyn Hutchinson and Margaret Hutchinson, his wife, both of whom were very close friends of hers. G. Evelyn Hutchinson, the Sterling Professor Emeritus of Zoology at Yale University, was responsible for West choosing Yale as the recipient of part of her materials. The bulk of her estate, including everything in her possession when she died, was purchased
by The University of Tulsa. Professor Hutchinson made every attempt to convince officials at Yale to purchase the estate, thereby housing the whole of a significant literary estate in the same place, to no avail. Dame Rebecca had little connection with the University of Tulsa, but the southern school was willing to fund the purchase and now houses the majority of West’s collection. The materials at the McFarlin Library are significant, but as yet, poorly organized. They consist of hundreds of letters, some from such notables as D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. All of her published works, including some of the more obscure, are present, as well as all of her unpublished works. Some of these are as fascinating for the reason they were not published as they are for their content. West’s entire personal library, her honors and awards, family pictures, private diaries, and all her business records are included in this collection. Her library numbers about 950 books,

10The only connection between West and The University of Tulsa appears to be indirect. In a letter West sent to Germaine Greer, head of the Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature, at The University of Tulsa, she gladly gave permission for her name to remain on the masthead of the program. Rebecca West, London, to Germaine Greer, Tulsa, 14 November 1980, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
many of which were inscribed by their authors or marked in by Dame Rebecca.

It is, of course, ironic that the tangible remains of an entire life lived in Great Britain should be in the United States. The British Library can boast, however, her original early newspaper and journal articles at the Newspaper Library in Colindale. It remains true, also, that most of those people who knew Dame Rebecca well live in Britain and are a valuable source of information. Those I interviewed held diverse opinions regarding her, but they were unanimous in the conclusion that Dame Rebecca was a formidable woman whose intellect and talent gave her a voice worth hearing.

Writing in most genres, West created a body of work that illuminates, to a large degree, the social, artistic, moral, and political evolution of the twentieth century. This dissertation explores chronologically West’s numerous works of nonfiction, and uses her fiction where it is appropriate to place into context social, historical, or biographical topics. The manner in which she took up the topics of feminism, art, religion, nationalism, war, history, treason, spying, and apartheid demonstrate the wide-ranging mind of an intellectual historian and social critic. Though her eclecticism makes her a difficult

West disposed of much of her library when she moved back to London following the death of her husband.
subject, the diversity of her mind and her talent in expressing her thoughts allow her work to symbolize and illuminate twentieth century intellectual history. Known for her elegant fiction, and forceful personal style, West should also be known as a thinker and social critic. For what is common to her eclectic opera is that she forcefully propounded ideas, shook loose staid preconceptions, and recommended new ways of perceiving politics, religion, art, culture, law, and morality.
CHAPTER II

"TO READ THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE"
THE PURSUIT OF REBECCA WEST

One of the striking features of West's life was her manifest sense of not belonging. In an interview nearly twenty years before her death she described herself as a mongrel.\(^1\) Born of Anglo-Irish and Scottish parents in England she said she "always felt an outsider."\(^2\) Indeed West showed a propensity throughout her life to create for herself an "outsider's" image in most situations, warranted or not. The name Rebecca West, as with many things about her, was not as it seemed. She was born Cicely Isabel Fairfield in 1892. The youngest of three girls, "Clissie" was precocious and rebellious. She recounts a story in her memoirs in which her father came upon her while she was digging up conkers in a flower bed. When he asked what she was about, she responded: "I am God, and they are people, and I made them die, and now I am resurrecting them." Her father, upon hearing this, asked a logical question. "But why did you make the

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\(^1\)Peter O'Toole and Rebecca West, "A Redbook Dialogue: Peter O'Toole and Rebecca West," Redbook Magazine March 1964, 56.

\(^2\)Ibid.
people die if you meant to dig them up again? Why didn't you just leave them alone?" "Well," replied Cissie, "that would have been all right for them. But it would have been no fun for me." The story lingered in West's mind because her father's loving and proud expression following the exchange as he sat and continued to watch her play her game. Leaving for the psychoanalyst the effort to determine the presence of any psychoanalytical overtones, this story is illustrative of two characteristics that would manifest themselves throughout her life. The first characteristic was her obvious need to control almost every situation in which she was involved, as well as some situations in which she was not directly involved. Also, West concluded the story by saying, "I came to the conclusion that he [her father] must be watching me simply because he loved me. . . . My heart swelled. . . ." This knowledge or desire of knowledge on her part would become extremely important because within a few years Charles Fairfield would leave his family and never return. West seemed to anguish most of her life over wanting to love but being unable to trust.


Her father, who had a taste for the sort of speculation that generally failed, created the type of home where economic insecurity flourished even down to the youngest child. While the Fairfields experienced a definite sense of financial classlessness, the children acquired a great deal of intellectual skill and confidence. They read voraciously and carried on discussions about significant current events that remained vivid in West's memory throughout her life.

Charles Fairfield left the family in 1901 to launch a pharmaceutical factory in West Africa. This speculative project came to the same end as many of his other ventures and ended in failure. He never returned to his family, instead living his last few years alone and poverty-stricken, he died in a Liverpool boarding house in 1906. The feeling of abandonment and betrayal Cissie felt as a child remained her constant companion throughout her life, and became a theme that found its way into her writings often and with intensity.

When their father left for Africa, Mrs. Fairfield took the children to Edinburgh to be near her family. It was in Scotland that West began to involve herself in the growing Suffrage movement. Because of an illness at the age of sixteen, she left George Watson's Ladies College which she attended on scholarship. During her
recuperation she wrote a letter to *The Scotsman* on the subject of women's suffrage. Moving to London at the age of eighteen, she briefly attended the Academy of Dramatic Art where she played the role of Rebecca West in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. The acting venture was not a success, but the name of this strong-willed character in the play lingered in her mind, so that when she published her first article for *The Freewoman*, a radical magazine her mother had forbidden her to read, she used the name to conceal her identity.

*The Freewoman* made its debut on 23 November 1911. A radical feminist weekly, it was devoted not only to the issue of universal suffrage but also to the fight for women's equality in every arena. The creator and editor of the paper was Dora Marsden for whom West had great respect. Marsden's belief that the feminist movement should represent broad interests was especially appealing to West during a period when the Pankhurst's message focused on the single issue of votes while their methods became increasingly violent. West was no doubt influenced by Marsden's view that feminism and socialism must be inextricably linked, and propounded this theme again and again during this period. West wrote because she was an artist and because she believed in the cause, but she was also under a constraint not always necessary for the
daughters of the middle class. She needed to support herself financially because her mother was unable to maintain her.

_The Freewoman_ did not survive for long. Its demise sprang from a lack of funds and from the distressing conclusions that Marsden began to come to. She moved increasingly towards a metaphysical position that linked industry with destruction of life itself. Rather than continuing the fight to raise a women’s place in industry to parity she began to preach a return to "primitive agriculture." Though Marsden would continue on as editor of the journal when it was resurrected as _The New Freewoman_, she and Rebecca began moving apart on the issues. West, jolted by the demise of the journal began to raise funds for a new journal. _The New Freewoman_ published its first issue in June 1913. Rebecca became a salaried assistant editor for £52 per year.

Ezra Pound joined the staff of _The New Freewoman_ as literary editor and soon began trying to move the paper in a strictly literary direction. In addition, Marsden, according to West, seemed fixed on attacking the Women’s Social and Political Union. West wrote to Marsden, in defense of the WSPU, "And can’t we stop attacking the

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"Rebecca West, _The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917_, selected and introduced by Jane Marcus (New York: The Viking Press, 1982), 5-6."
WSPU? The poor dears are weak at metaphysics but they are doing their best to revolt."

Faced with this conflict, West decided to leave the paper. She had already begun, by 1914, to write for Robert Blatchford’s Clarion, a socialist newspaper whose format reflected her own wider base of interests. Many years later West would write of Blatchford, that he had been able to unite diverse people for the purpose of helping others as few others could do.” He was an inspiring figure to her. Also West had begun contributing articles to the Daily News. In point of fact, Rebecca West could no longer continue as editor of The New Freewoman because she was pregnant. The child’s father was H.G. Wells whom West had begun to see in 1911 after she wrote a blistering review of his novel Marriage. West presented a challenge to the middle-aged author whose fame was perhaps not exceeded during the early part of the century. It was not Wells’s first “challenge” of this sort.

Much has been written about the relationship between West and Wells. In fact, much of the proper legacy of

*Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life. 40.

"Rebecca West, "Reflections on Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Calaghan," Washington Post 26 April 1979, A23.

West, The Young Rebecca, 64-69.
Rebecca West has been obscured by a persistent public interest in this phase of her life. It is curious to note that, while Wells’s legacy supersedes this incident in his life, West was never able, during her lifetime, to throw off this baggage in favor of her worth as a writer. Questions by the print and broadcast media on the topic of her relationship with Wells never ceased. In part, of course, this situation existed because the relationship produced a son, Anthony West, and Anthony continued throughout his life to make public his quarrels with his mother. As an unmarried mother West experienced again, first-hand, the feeling of being an outcast. It was Wells’s wish that Rebecca remain outside of London during her pregnancy. This was a request that she found increasingly difficult to comply with. Anthony was born in Hunstanton, a small sea-side town in Norfolk, on 4 August 1914. Great Britain, on the same day, declared war on Germany. Rebecca began work in earnest soon after Anthony’s birth. She began to contribute regularly to *The New Republic* at the encouragement of Walter Lippmann and in 1916 published *Henry James*. The following year she published a novel full of Freudian overtones called *The Return of the Soldier*. This work depicted clearly West’s own emotional and social conflicts. It is an attack on social pretense apparent in phony class distinction.
Moreover, *The Return of the Soldier* is an assault on a society that cared more for convention than truth. While the main character of the novel could have remained in an amnesic state and lived with the passion of a long passed love, West determined that it is better to come into the light of reality, no matter how unpleasant. A dramatic statement spoken by the character who tells the story in this novel depicts rather well what would be a lifelong determination of West's:

Why did her tears reveal to me what I had learned long ago, but had forgotten in my frenzied love, that there is a draught we must drink or not be fully human? I knew that one must know the truth. I knew quite well that when one is an adult one must raise to one's lips the wine of truth, headless that it is not sweet like milk but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk forever queer and small like a dwarf.*

To "celebrate communion with reality" was a task West was not always up to throughout her life, but it was for her the driving force behind almost all she undertook. She believed that life gave up its mysteries to those who sought its answers. As a young woman, involved in a love affair with H.G. Wells that was in many ways, antithetical to her own standards of independent womanhood, she was forced to abandon her ideological amnesia and face the truth. In 1916, when *The Return of the Soldier* was

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published, West was faced with the knowledge that Wells was a philanderer who had no intention of divorcing Jane Wells to marry her. She also knew that her need for him was rooted deeply in her being. While understanding this part of herself, she was never able to cast it away. She wrote in 1916 that it was a good thing for a woman to love a man, but there were things "at least as great for women whose independent spirits can ride fearlessly and without interest outside the home park of their personal relationships, but independence is not the occupation of most of us." 

West continued on with her career allowing the relationship with Wells to drag on to no one’s benefit. Anthony, least of all, survived the tumult. Following the publication of her second novel, The Judge in 1923, West and Wells made the break in their relationship which would prove to be final. In October of the same year Rebecca left on a lecture tour of the United States. While in America she had a brief and unhappy affair with Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook. While the visit was not

10 Ibid., 51-52.

In a letter to A.J.P. Taylor, Lord Beaverbrook’s biographer and West’s friend, she stated that she and Max had agreed in 1928-29 to destroy all the letters they had written to eachother. They did this and promised they would do likewise with any correspondence they might exchange in the future. Apparently neither felt compelled to keep that promise. She closed the letter to Taylor by
romantically successful, it was economically profitable. West left the United States with a contract in which she agreed to come to America for two months out of the year and write book reviews for the New York Herald-Tribune. Her contact with William Randolph Hearst in New York provided a similarly profitable lifetime arrangement.

During the decade of the twenties West increased her fictional opus with the publication of *The Judge* (1922), *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (1929), *War Nurse: The True Story of a Woman Who Lived, Loved, and Suffered on the Western Front* (1926), and *The Harsh Voice: Four Short Novels* (these short novels were written in the 1920s and published in book form in 1935). *The Judge*, in particular, established an important cornerstone in West's thought. The main character, Ellen Melville, who appears to be an autobiographical surrogate for West, determined throughout the course of the story that though life can be manifestly unpleasant it is better embraced than shunned. "She [Melville] wanted people to be as splendid as the countryside, as noble as the mountains, as variable within the limits of beauty as the Firth of Forth, and this [brutality] was what they were really saying, ". . . and I would be very grateful if I were not associated with Max in any way." Taylor granted her this wish. Rebecca West, London, to A.J.P. Taylor, 15 June 1958, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
like. She wept undisguisedly.¹² Later in the story, after coming to terms with the nature of men and the world, Ellen decides that it must be accepted on its own terms. "Nothing would make her content with reality."¹³ Thus, she concludes, that "throwing in her lot with them and the human race which is perpetually defeated, she was nevertheless choosing the side of victory."¹⁴ Rebecca West came to the same conclusion in the period between the wars in Europe. Behavior, attitudes, and ideology were of little value if they did not place the individual first. World War II and its aftermath would confirm these decisions to her. Certainly her 1933 biography of Saint Augustine was a direct attempt to understand the historical underpinnings of her modern day conclusions.

Along with numerous journalistic pieces, West also wrote her most complete essay on the nature of art, The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews, published in 1928. A great deal of the material that she contributed to the Bookman in 1929 and 1930 was compiled and published in 1931 as Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log. West was by then making a fair amount of money. Her short stories were

¹³Ibid., 87.
¹⁴Ibid., 430.
commanding between $2,000.00 and $3,000.00 apiece, while she also received royalties from the publication of her books and other money from her contracts with magazines and newspapers. She invested in the stock market and did well, explaining, "If I do not do sensible things about investments I shall spend my old age in a workhouse, where nobody will understand my jokes."  

West surprised her friends and the public on 1 November 1930 by "becoming Mrs. Henry Maxwell Andrews." Andrews was an international banker whose eclectic European roots interested Rebecca. He was born in Burma and raised in England and Germany, as well as Rangoon. He went up to Oxford in 1913 but was caught in Germany when the First World War broke out and interned. He finally completed his study at Oxford in 1921. His banking career—he was an officer with Schroders—began its decline when Hitler came to power in Germany, because most of his business was done in that country, leaving Rebecca with the lion's share of financial responsibility most of their married life. Her marriage has often been viewed as a denial of both her early socialist and

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16Rebecca West telegram to Fannie Hurst, 1930, in Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 128.
continuing feminist ideals. This was not the case. Her enchantment with socialism began waning much earlier when she learned of events in Soviet Russia. Further, her decision to marry stemmed from emotional needs and desires rather than financial ones. Though Henry was to prove to be a great supporter of her, West often complained that as a woman she was forced into divided loyalties between her work and her husband. Frequent business trips to Germany in the 1930s did provide Rebecca with an early indication of Hitler’s atrocious intentions. Perhaps the only thing she shared with Winston Churchill, of whom she was not fond, was a voice crying in the wilderness during this period.17

In West’s memoirs, which have recently been published, she stated that, "My marriage was certainly the most important thing in my life, though I never understood why it had that primacy."18 Henry and Cicely, as he called

17In many letter to friends and family West mentioned the atmosphere in Germany and how much she deplored it. As early as 1931, in a letter to her sister, Winnie, she wrote that it was "a pity that they [Germans] should look forward to a Hitlerite government, which will shoot all the Jews." Rebecca West to Winifred Macleod, 1931, in Glendinning. Rebecca West: A Life, 149. In 1933, regarding the German political situation, she wrote to Fannie Hurst, "don’t think that we don’t weep the tears of blood that all decent human beings must weep..." Rebecca West to Fannie Hurst, 1933, in Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 149.

18West, Family Memories, 223
her, lived in Buckinghamshire, outside of London, until Henry's death in 1968. Though the marriage at times seemed based more on mutual need than love, it provided Rebecca, at least, some measure of security. No doubt the relationship with Henry created many problems, but it solved more by providing Rebecca a legitimate, and therefore safer, haven from which to do battle with the world. Although in dramatic fashion she followed the statement about the primacy of her marriage and her political decisions with this remark. "My work might have been as important as either of these if it had not been condemned to exist in limbo. I was never able to live the life of a writer because of these two over-riding factors, my sexual life, or rather death, and my politics."¹ So while she needed the security and propriety of marriage, she sometimes thought it as drain on her career. Her only published novel during the 1930s, which she dedicated to her husband, contains a statement by the heroine, Isabelle, that perhaps summed up her thinking on her own relationship.

She had not the least idea what he was thinking. It struck her that the difference between men and women is the rock on which civilization will split before it can reach any goal that could justify its expenditure of effort. She also knew that her

¹Ibid.
life would not be tolerable if he were not there. . . .\textsuperscript{20}

As World War II drew closer West focused more and more on the world's moral and political situation. In her 1933 biography of Saint Augustine, she compared the Roman civilization of the Church Father's day to the Europe of her own. Both were existing precariously while hoards of barbarians were perched waiting to descend. While Europe waited, West left for the United States where she wrote a series of articles about the New Deal for the \textit{New York Times}. She was also under contract with the \textit{Daily Telegraph}, \textit{Time and Tide}, and the \textit{New York American}. Her income before the war was considerable, which eased a difficult situation, for Henry had decided he could not in good conscience deal with the new German regime and had resigned his position with Schroders in 1935.

Whatever remained of West's sympathy for the Soviet experiment died when, in 1939, the Russians signed the non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany. She later called this a meeting of extremes; and "the meeting was quite unholy."\textsuperscript{21} Not only did she see events in Germany as they

\textsuperscript{20}Rebecca West, \textit{The Thinking Reed} (New York: Viking Press, 1936), 431.

unfolded prior to the outbreak of the war, but she was sent by the British Council to Scandinavia, Greece, Bulgaria, and the Baltic provinces, including Yugoslavia, to observe and report on the attitudes of these nations towards both Germany and England. Her specific task included recording observations, impressions, and making political assessments which would be transmitted to the Foreign Office. While she felt that her trips for the British Council were basically a waste of time and money, she came away from the experience with a new personal passion that would command a large part of her time, talent, and money for the rest of her life.22

Yugoslavia not only became the central focus of West’s non-fiction work, but her efforts on behalf of that country consumed much of her time during the war years. She made three trips to Yugoslavia in all before writing Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia, first published in 1941. The contracts she made while in Yugoslavia almost preordained her involvement later with the Yugoslav government exiled in London. The brave resistance of the Yugoslav people, particularly the Serbs, to the German aerial bombardment of their country raised them to a heroic position, in West’s eyes. In Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, she dramatically

22Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 153-54
stated, "Often, when I have thought of invasion, or when a bomb has dropped near by, I have prayed, 'Let me behave like a Serb.'"\(^{22}\)

Henry and Rebecca provided funds for many Yugoslavs who were fortunate enough to find their way to London during and after the war. They became particularly involved with the Gavrilovitch family. The correspondence file between members of that family and West numbers well over 500 letters. West and her husband continued until their deaths to aid the family in many ways, not the least of which was financial. Milan Gavrilovic had been the first Yugoslav Minister to the Soviet Union, he was the founder of the Serbian Peasant Party, as well as being Minister of Justice in the Yugoslav Government in exile. His position as minister in the exiled government assured his place as a defendant at the trial Tito staged after the war against Dragoljub-Draza Mihailovic and the rest of the non-communist "traitors." He was tried in absentia and convicted, which prevented his ever returning to his homeland. During the war, he had enlisted Rebecca's help in trying to persuade Churchill not to back Tito and the Communists. One look at West's estate indicates the extent of her involvement. There are large and numerous

\(^{22}\)West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, 1126.
files containing a plethora of information on the Yugoslav question. Included are some top secret reports both from the Yugoslav Government and from the British Foreign Office.

West came to believe that there had been a considerable amount of intrigue involved in the British decision to aid Tito, who she recognized immediately, in her words, as a Stalinist. Though Tito exercised some independence from Stalin after the war, it mattered little in the life of the nation. She continued well into the 1970s to support the positions she took during the war regarding the Regent, Prince Paul, General Mihailovic, and the appeasement policy England adopted at the expense of Yugoslavia. When Black Lamb and Grey Falcon was reissued in 1982, West chose to make no changes. She stood by what she had written. In some ways it is a service to the historian for that work to stay as it was written in the late 1930s. While West may have been wrong on certain points, and other historical debates may never be resolved, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, because of the extraordinary timing of the writing, becomes almost an on-the-spot report of the outbreak of World War II.

Meanwhile, West continued to write journalistic pieces which reported on everything from the young
Princess Elizabeth to the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt for the third time. In 1946 West went to Nuremberg to report on the war-crimes trial for the Daily Telegraph. She believed the trials were necessary despite the clumsy mechanisms by which they were forced to operate. These articles, along with other reports from the United States, were later published in A Train of Powder (1955). In the same vein, West began attending the post-war trials of British traitors. The result of this effort was one of the most interesting and provocative of all her works, The Meaning of Treason (1947). Later, West would expand her reportage to include the atomic spies and the communist spies, and write a revised edition called The New Meaning of Treason (1964).

Following the publication of the first of these books, West was called by Time magazine, "the world’s No. 1 woman writer," and found herself on the cover of the magazine.24

She continued in the 1940s and 1950s to write journalistic pieces that found publication on both sides of the Atlantic. To be sure, she was not held to strict journalistic limitations, as evidence her articles which often turned into exciting short stories and sometimes short novels. In addition, her best loved, and most

autobiographical novel, *The Fountain Overflows*, was published in 1956. The book was an enormous commercial success. It was intended to be the first in a trilogy that traced the lives and struggles of an English family throughout the twentieth century. The other novels in the trilogy were completed except for what West called "polishing up." They were, however, never published in her lifetime. Glendinning, West's biographer, offers the suggestion that because these novels were so autobiographical and "constitute her most public and intimate personal statement" she was unable to complete them.\(^2\)

Though West went on adding to the manuscript for at least another decade, she never wrote the ending. *This Real Night* and *Cousin Rosamund* have, however, been published posthumously.\(^3\)

West's longstanding belief that communism had betrayed socialism became in the 1950s somewhat of an obsession of hers. To the bewilderment of many of her friends, West seemed to advocate the McCarthy panic sweeping the United States. In 1953 she wrote a long article for *U.S. News and World Report* entitled "As a


Briton Looks At 'McCarthyism.'"^27 Some of West’s friends understood the article to be an endorsement of the McCarthy hysteria. It seemed so much an endorsement, in fact, that her good friend G.E. Hutchinson encouraged her to write a letter to the New York Times repudiating McCarthy’s tactics. West, who did in fact deplore McCarthy’s tactics, declined to defend herself in this way, least her real message be obscured. Communism, she argued logically, is totalitarianism. It must, therefore, by its nature inhibit the free expression of the individual will. A threat like this, whether it comes from the Right or Left, must be destroyed. West was acutely aware that Liberals, which she considered herself, had failed in the realm of ideological warfare with serious results. "Liberals," she stated, "cannot afford to be silly or untruthful."^28 The response of liberals in the 1930s in Germany was, to her, proof positive of this statement. A strong reaction against Communism, therefore, was appropriate "in any society not manifestly insane."^29


^29West, "As A Briton Looks At ‘McCarthyism,’" 66.
West maintained her anti-communist and "liberal" stance for the rest of her life. She continued her quest to balance political realities in her 1966 novel *The Birds Fall Down*. The novel, dedicated to "Milan and Lela Gavrillovitch: whom I love and honour", is set in Paris around the turn of the century. The theme is the mutual quest of the major characters, who are Russian emigres, to overthrow the evil Tsarist regime, and the point of the story is to explore the various means of achieving that end. In the end victory becomes defeat, as evil replaces evil. West seems to find no solution to the problem of evil within the realm of political solutions. She eventually became disillusioned and uncommitted to any political position. She did not, however, waiver in her commitment to what she believed essential to society; upholding the rights of man as defined in the French Revolution.

West traveled extensively in her later years and won honors and awards too numerous to mention. In 1957 she delivered the Terry Lectures at Yale University which were published as *The Court and the Castle: Some Treatments of*.

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31 Ibid., v.
a Recurrent Theme.\textsuperscript{32} In 1960, West visited South Africa on a "special mission" for \textit{The Sunday Times}, which produced an excellent four-part series.\textsuperscript{33} With little trouble she was able to predict what would become of a country that practiced such abominable restrictions of human rights. After Henry's death in 1968, Rebecca sold Ibstone house in Buckinghamshire and moved back to London. From there she made trips to Ireland, to visit her father's birthplace, to Mexico, and to Monte Carlo. The world never ceased to fascinate and discourage her. As the century moved well past the half way mark, West was asked to write numerous articles from the perspective of one who had witnessed the difficulties of the past in hopes of making sense of the confusing present. In 1982, Viking published \textit{1900}, which was her reflective look back on the turn of the century. West, who remembered the arrival of the twentieth century, and matured as the century matured, wrote: "We had to recast our impressions of the world as it had been altered by the work done by the last generation in the way of thinking and feeling; and once we had done that we had to work out

\textsuperscript{32}Rebecca West, \textit{The Court and the Castle: Some Treatments of a Recurrent Theme} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

\textsuperscript{33}Rebecca West, "In The Cauldron of Africa," \textit{The Sunday Times}, 27 March, 17 April, 24 April, 1 May 1960.
what our place was in this new world. We were an old civilization, but we had to start again." West evoked much of the same feeling for England and the rest of the world as it existed in 1982. She understood well that a new generation would follow, altered by the work she and her generation had accomplished. Always by nature, an historian, it was to the past that she looked for answers.

West continued to write and write convincingly until her death in 1983. She had been honored by many nations with their highest titles of achievement, while her list of honorary doctorates belied her lack of formal education. Her life, as with most lives well spent, was a process of education. Her career began boldly and remained vibrant for seventy-two years. She came politically of age during the struggle for women's suffrage in Great Britain and the struggle to achieve an egalitarian, classless society in Russia. Her political education was molded by watching the devastating results of the failure of political ideologies, as well as, the sometimes ineffectual results of political victories. In 1982 Virago Press and Viking Press published a collection of West's early writings, (1911-1917).

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1 West, 1900, 72.

2 West, The Young Rebecca.
finds the germs of ideas she would develop throughout her life.

On the surface there were many inconsistencies in Rebecca West’s life. As it is with humans, she was at times unable to force her behavior to mirror her beliefs. But there is a remarkable consistency that underpins her seventy-two years of public thinking. West was an absolutist in the sense that she believed in a posited wholeness, a unity, and a completeness of reality. That unity of reality, however, lay beyond the world of individual experience. An individual’s experience was unique and essential because it fitted into a whole, thereby adding to the way in which human beings understood reality. West sought to add to the knowledge of the whole, as well as come to some satisfactory understanding of "reality" herself. Her career and life is illustrative of this process.
CHAPTER III

"A DOORMAT OR A PROSTITUTE"
COMMITMENT TO FEMINISM

The life and career of Rebecca West can best be characterized by an experience she had as a girl. In 1916 she wrote that while in school she was called in to see the headmistress to account for her behavior. She had been caught writing a poem about the death of God while in a cooking class. "Why," I would ask her, if I could stand again in the office where I last stood, Indicted for the comic crime of writing a poem on "The Death of God" in the cookery class, "why did you tell me nothing of life?"

Presumably, while the other girls were learning to bake bread, Rebecca West was contemplating the status of God. West’s career began and thrived because almost everything she ever contemplated she wrote down. This incident did not prove to be the last time that what she wrote caused trouble. The cooking class expanded into the classroom of life while West continued to inquire into the whereabouts of God. What the head-mistress failed to teach her about life, she went seeking

on her own. Most of what she found she wrote about, and most of what she wrote about was worth finding.

In 1933 Rebecca West stated what could easily be considered the driving force of her life and the central dilemma. In *A Letter to a Grandfather*, written for the Hogarth Press, the granddaughter explained her spiritual awakening upon viewing the destruction of one of her ancestors architectural creations.

He had made too good a copy. I shuddered, being aware that that was why men had destroyed it. Man does not want to know. When he knows very little he plays with the possibility of knowledge, but when he finds that pieces he has been putting together are going to spell out the answer to the riddle he is frightened, and he throws them in every direction; and another civilisation falls.²

West observed this reaction to be the fundamental problem with human beings and thus resolved to read the "riddle of the universe" as best she could. "How I have longed to have that full copy, and raged at the remaining fragment for being so small a part of it, and worshipped it for the revelation it made of the quality of the whole."³

The career of Rebecca West demonstrates her search for "the remaining fragment." Few other writers have so asiduously and publicly grappled with the issues that are

³Ibid., 10-11.
the reality of every twentieth century person. As Samuel
Hynes wrote, "Communion with reality is a large
ambition... It is the course that Dame Rebecca has
followed..." West followed an unusual course, but
the pattern of her career is clear. She dealt first with
the unavoidable issue of gender. In 1913, she wrote, "I
myself have never been able to find out precisely what
feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist
whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from
a doormat or a prostitute." After dealing, to her own
satisfaction, strictly with the subject of feminism, she
allowed her writing to reflect her true range of think-
ing, dealing with subjects that not only interested her
but that seemed as if they might explain the "riddle of
the universe." However, the issue of feminism was ever
present, implicitly or explicitly, in all her works.

West broke onto the literary scene while she was
still a young woman. She had two passionate concerns;
the gross inequality of women and the devastating results
of the Industrial Revolution. Her early writings for The
Freewoman, The New Freewoman, and The Clarion demonstrate
her extraordinary talent and her irrepressible anger.

"Rebecca West, Rebecca West: A Celebration, introduc-
tion by Samuel Hynes (New York: The Viking Press, 1977),
x1.

"West, The Young Rebecca, 219."
West’s writings for these journals have been characterized as both feminist and socialist. But using labels on Rebecca West often leads one into great inaccuracy. The passionate intensity with which she declared herself both feminist and socialist in those early years is clear; that she sustained any lasting commitment to either issue is a matter of debate.

Rebecca West came of age during a period of great change for women. Having been left fatherless at a early age, she realized perhaps more keenly than others that a women must be equipped to manage life on her own. Possessing the intellect and talent that she did, an economically viable career was an obtainable goal if women were aided by the laws. Women had so few legal rights that they were often forced into penury if left without a man. With a man, a woman was often powerless to control her own estate. Both financial and political impotency locked women into a physical and emotional bondage that decried their value as social and private beings. West’s passion came, no doubt, from her very personal sense of betrayal by individual men within the framework of a male-dominated society. This situation in no way devalues her feminism, but it makes clear what some perceived as her ambivalence with regard to the development of feminism later in her life.
This dualism manifests itself most clearly in her fiction. The autobiographical character of Rose Aubry in The Fountain Overflows trilogy describes a home without a man as being like food with no salt.

We were again to have a man in the family, as we had not had since Papa and Richard Quin left us; and that was in itself a precious recovery. Kate kept a man’s hat and overcoat hanging in our hall, and pretended it was to intimidate burglars, but it was really a complaint to the gods that we had had to eat our meat without salt for many years. We had not thought that we would ever see good salt on our table again.*

This type of sentiment expressed again and again in West’s autobiographical fiction, along with some of her life choices lead one easily to the conclusion that, while intellectually committed to feminism, she could not escape her own Edwardian roots.7

Most of those who study West contend that her adherence to feminism was one of the few ideologies she clung to consistently all her life. Some of her critics claim, however, that her “espousal of independent womanhood may have resulted more from her self-centered moral convic-


7The Fountain Overflows, This Real Night, and Cousin Rosamund are a fictional trilogy considered to be autobiographical.
tions than from a desire for social equality." Moria Ferguson suggested that West advocated rights for women mostly to further her own goals, but never turned her words into a political mandate that called for action. Ferguson based this argument on what she perceived to be West's fatalistic, even Calvinistic, philosophy of life, whereby individual and collective resistance becomes profitless. This short-sighted argument ignores West's lifetime of involvement and activism. Yet others have stated that if "Mrs. Pankhurst was the commanding general of the Suffragist movement. Rebecca West could be thought of as its herald and, to a degree, its historian." Jill Craigie expressed the sentiment that while West markedly changed her political views, "To her feminist convictions she has remained rootedly consistent." While feminism may be many things, it is not monolithic and thus it is a mistake to try and hold West to any particular set of dogma. West should be thought of not only as a feminist but also as a feminist theorist for obvious reasons. Her primary life's work was an

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"Deakin, Rebecca West, 31.

"Jill Craigie, "Still the Wittiest Woman in London," The Times (London), 6 December 1982, 8."
attempt to understand humankind, in general, and the relationship between men and women, in particular. She thought and wrote about oppression and liberation in the broadest sense, not always explicitly about women, but always with women in mind. As well, she was a working intellectual who made her living from dealing with ideas of all kinds. In this way she was a practical theorist and feminist, because her example made more of statement often times than her words, which were equally powerful. Her life and her work was a process of unraveling and revealing the mysteries at work between men and women and the mysteries at work in life.

It is true that West's brand of feminism is distinctly her own. A consistent trait throughout her life is her rebelliousness, not only against society and the status quo but also against any organized type of power or resistance. When West began writing for The Freewoman in 1911 she made a name for herself not only by her vitriolic attacks against the government but by her criticism of a suffragist movement whose focus was sometimes askew. She was vigilant in sniffing out "pseudo-feminism" even in those thought to be the most open-minded. Her taking of the name Rebecca West, at the age of nineteen, was to conceal these particular writing activities from her mother. Not that her mother would
have objected to her being a writer, for that, West said, was in her blood. "I never wrote for The Freewoman till it had got such a bad name for its candor that I was forbidden to read it by my family, and thus I came to adopt my present pseudonym." 11

The Freewoman was devoted not only to political enfranchisement for women but to a wider range of feminist issues. The journal spoke candidly about sex and venereal disease, "and in the worst possible taste; so that England fainted with shock and on recovering listened quite calmly. . . ." 12 According to West, its most significant contribution came in smashing the romantic pretense that a woman's birth-right was contentedness in an environment created by men. Just as the poor who were tortured by the social and economic system, were dangerous, so too women, who suffered from a "male adaptation to life," were dangerous if unable to find for themselves a means by which they might themselves adapt. To be sure, one of the consistent themes in West's work was that individuals must struggle to find the "bricks in the universe" that define them and their place in the world. Individuals set at odds with reality are at odds

11West, The Young Rebecca, 5.
12Ibid.
with themselves. Her later works on treason come back to this theme again.

The Freewoman: A Weekly Humanist Review was published from 23 November 1911 until 10 October 1912. Harriet Weaver financed it and Dora Marsden edited the journal. The suffragist movement at that point had limited itself to the single issue of enfranchisement for women, but Marsden and others felt there was a need for a frank discussion about a wider range of feminist issues. West, whose first article for The Freewoman is dated 30 November 1911, was certainly a positive edition to the new journal. Her broad interests and able presentation made her articles both entertaining and controversial. She continued writing and became literary editor for The New Freewoman: An Individualist Review, as it was renamed, during its brief existence. (15 June 1913–15 December 1913) The journal then became The Egoist: An Individualist Review which, when Dora Marsden resigned, began to shift its focus. West stayed on as literary editor for a short while, but eventually clashed with Ezra Pound, whom she had hired. Pound was determined to turn the journal into an avant garde literary publication with little interest in feminist issues.

West’s articles in The Freewoman and The New Freewoman take mostly the form of book reviews. Her
reviews tended to lump the books into one of two categories. The first were those written by anti-feminists who generally were persons of high standing in English society. With them she was ruthless. The second group, mostly novels, were written by those who espoused some sort of equality for women but in their works treated their female fictional characters traditionally. West was no less ruthless with this group and perhaps rightly so because their sexism was subtly transmitted into society at large.

Before she turned twenty, West, with remarkable acumen, was taking on the likes of Mrs. Humphry Ward, Harold Owen, and E. Belfort Bax. She accused Mrs. Ward, in her novel *Daphne*, of participating in the destruction of honor in the modern world. The central character, Daphne, an American heiress, married an Englishman who was in love with her money. Following an uneventful period in their marriage she tired of him and returned to America with their only child. The child died while away from the father who had taken to drink. Daphne, overcome with guilt and grief, returned to her now ex-husband to ask his forgiveness. He rejected her, choosing to die alone. "Now, what lesson does Mrs. Ward learn from this rather trivial story?" West asked.\footnote{Ibid., 16.} She does not
mention that it is a bad thing to marry for money alone. Nor does she mention that it is "vile" for a man to earn his living by entering into a sexual relationship. Rather Mrs. Ward concluded that divorces are too easily obtained in America. West correctly perceived in this one novel, that the social mores that condoned all things within the framework of marriage was wholly destructive to the freedom of women. It would be far better Ward concluded, that Daphne and her "parasite" continue to live together despite the fact that they intensely dislike one another. "To her, all things done in the name of the taboo of marriage seem beautiful."14

West wasted no time in getting to the heart of the problem in another review: "Mr. Harold Owen is a natural slave, having no conception of liberty nor any use for it. So, as a Freewoman, I review his anti-feminist thesis, Woman Adrift, with chivalrous reluctance, feeling that a steam-engine ought not to crush a butterfly."15 Owen's thesis was that women were "wholly superfluous" to the state except as mothers. Thus, they rightly had no role outside of the home, which, he contended, grants to women an honored place in society that should more than satisfy them. In support of his position Owen cited the fact that women, because they were honored, were treated

14Ibid.

15Ibid., 28.
more gently than men who were accused of the same crime. He doubted that any woman, including a feminist, would want to relinquish her place of honor or any other benefit so that she might obtain something as trivial as the vote. West responded by mentioning that greater legal minds than his would certainly refute his position that women fared better in the law courts than men but she concedes the point to set up her punch line: "This amounts to an admission that men prefer bad women."  

Part of West's popularity certainly stemmed from her wit. She began a review of E. Belfort Bax like this: "Problems of Men, Mind and Morals is further evidence of the fact which the Labour Party proved long ago -- that when a socialist takes to being dull, he is much duller than anybody else." Bax sounded the old refrain that women held such an honored place in society that they, including the suffragists, would never really be willing to abandon even one of their "privileges" for the awesome obligations of the "real citizen." "These remarks," West retorted, "plainly point to the appalling fact that Mr. Bax has the temerity to write upon public affairs without reading The Freewoman."  

While West used her talent to mock the anti-feminist

^Ibid., 29.
^7Ibid., 35.
^8Ibid.
she never took the cause of women lightly. She spent many hours pouring over the books she reviewed and writing articles she hoped would actually make a difference. Some of her more memorable articles were reviews of novels by some of the literary elite of her day. To be sure, her review of H.G.Well's novel, *Marriage*, made more of a difference than she could have ever imagined. Wells was well known for advocating free love and independent women, yet his principle character, Marjorie, was a dependent, sniveling scoundrel out to undo the intellectual pursuits of her husband in return for insignificant material possessions. What infuriated West was that she believed Wells accepted her "scoundrelism" as the normal condition of women. She quoted Well's Marjorie as saying, "What are women -- half-savages, half-pets, unemployed things of greed and desire -- and suddenly we want all the rights and respect of souls!" West retorted; "And Mr. Wells agrees with them." It is telling of the upward battle in which the suffragists were engaged that such attitudes came even from those who espoused liberation for women.

This review sparked the interest of Wells who sought West out to meet her. Their notorious ten year love affair was one of the most difficult periods in West's life and produced a great deal of bitterness. Wells had

17 Ibid., 67.
18 Ibid., 68.
a wife, Jane, whom he had no intention of leaving. Jane knew about his many affairs and helped in various ways when they became complicated or bothersome. In fact, when West gave birth to Anthony in 1914, Wells told Jane it had been a difficult delivery and she replied "to give her dear love to Rebecca 'if you can.'"\textsuperscript{21} While Jane seemed to have accepted Rebecca as a fact of life with Wells, Rebecca never reconciled herself to the role of mistress. Wells insisted that Rebecca go into virtual seclusion during her pregnancy, making complete his own sexual hypocrisy. She continued to write as much as possible during her pregnancy, with Wells helping with the finances.

This entire episode displays the inconsistency of the human race and Rebecca West. She had written an article, shortly before her pregnancy, on the plight of the unmarried mother. In it, she separated out the attitude of "we socialists," who do not hold the common opinion that "an unmarried mother is the most outcast thing on earth."\textsuperscript{22} Her own observations in 1913, concerning the attitudes of society in general towards unwed mothers, however, were to prove tragically true in her own case, in 1914. "Vulgar people will be rude to her, respectable people will avoid her, everybody will

\textsuperscript{21}Quoted in Glendinning, \textit{Rebecca West: A Life}, 52.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 140.
whisper about the scandal of her birth. She will suffer a subtly corroding sense of personal cheapness."\(^2^3\)

Despite her knowledge of Wells underlying attitude regarding women she was willing, for a time, to stay in a situation in which the double standard Wells applied was unbearable. Not only was Rebecca encouraged to deny the truth to friends but their son Anthony was denied knowledge of his own paternity for some time, calling his father Wellsie. Wells’s handling of the situation with West implied his sexist attitudes. He was explicit, however, in his correspondence with Arnold Bennett regarding his view of the “secondariness” of women.\(^2^4\) He wanted a fiery, intellectual feminist who would stay at home and be a discreet mistress.

In September 1912, before the birth of Anthony, West became a political writer for *The Clarion*, a socialist newspaper edited by Robert Blatchford, while continuing her reviews for *The New Freewoman*. West’s position on women’s issues became at this time indistinguishable from her acceptance of socialism. The sentiment she expressed in 1911 in *The Freewoman*, had taken on broader implications by 1913: “A strong hatred is the best lamp to bear in our hands as we go over the dark places of life.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., 141.

cutting away the dead things men tell us to revere." In addition to a male-dominated society, British politics and industrialized capitalism reeked of the "dead things" she had been told to respect. West encouraged mankind through her art to embrace those things that were life-giving. By that she meant that any action or institution should be examined to determine whether it led to life or to death. If it led to life, it was to be cherished; if it lead to death, it was to be shunned. Though man in his nature retained the capacity for both he often appeared to be in active pursuit of death. British history seemed to West to have turned its back on life. The Clarion gave West the opportunity to perfect her ability to dissect current events critically. She was relentless about laying bear those institutions in British society that bred moral, physical, and spiritual bankruptcy.

Her progression from feminism to socialism seems inevitable. She viewed the feminist movement of her day as an unalterably positive force, "The excellent thing about the suffrage movement is its insatiable appetite for life." Socialism, she believed, held as a primary principle the absolute equality of women. Thus, socialism became the means by which equal rights would be realized

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\(^{25}\)West, The Young Rebecca, 23.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 137.
In British history. Socialism, in the first part of this century, offered what must have seemed to her to be the last, best hope for mankind. It stood in opposition to the passive acceptance of poverty created by industrialized society. It stood, in principle, against the subjugation of women as workers, as political participants, and as human beings. Socialism, she believed, affirmed the dignity of all mankind.

West’s condemnation of the capitalist system came from many directions. Among other things she contended that the factory paralleled the home in a male-dominated society, in that it made the same sort of demand from women -- "physical drudgery, combined with mental inertia." Both, she believed, were suitable for those with the intelligence of rabbits. Under the existing system, women in the labor force became the bearers of an additional evil. Working women, West wrote on 4 July 1913, never had enough to eat. "The capitalist can buy their whole time for seven shillings a week, they are sluttish with poverty and dazed with overwork and underfeeding." West concluded, dramatically, that no civilization had ever burdened women so much as the capitalist system of modern times. By making her a

\[2^7\text{Ibid., 18.}\]
\[2^8\text{Ibid., 186-87.}\]
"factory-hand by day," and "a domestic drudge by night," he had destroyed the creative, life-giving energy of women. West was not one given to understatement, particularly while writing in a genre intended to startle.

"A woman," West wrote, "according to the capitalist, is an air-bubble blown between earth and sky, with no human ties of any sort." Women were paid far less than men under the pretext that men would receive the larger wages and then support the women as their wives. Male society behaved as if women had no dependents, as though women were as carefree and irresponsible as an air-bubble. Thus, the capitalist while draining the strength from the exploited class, further exploited a new sub-class: women. West wrote angrily that women ought to understand that in submitting themselves to this "swindle of underpayment" they were not only insulting themselves, but doing a deadly injury to the community. Women who enter the labor market, she advised, must take capital with them so that they might dictate the conditions of their own labor. They must from the start "capture the fortresses of industry." While West outlined no clear plan for the accumulation of this capital, she did began to advise the use of the syndicalist strategy. Particularly with the failure of the

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*Ibid., 103.*
Labour Party, she saw more clearly that a strike of major proportions was the only way to effect change. For example, the National Union of Teachers, whose membership was divided equally between men and women, accepted as part of its policy that women teachers would be paid substantially less for the same job. These women, according to West, had their fate in their own hands and yet refused to make the difference by calling a strike.\(^{30}\)

Women’s disinclination to act stemmed from the influence that society had on them. Women were taught to be idle. They were, in fact schooled in the insignificant. With the rise of the great middle-class, through the Industrial Revolution, more and more women remained not only outside of the labor market but also remained idle in their own homes. West warned that with the demands of the workers picking the middle-class’s right pocket (free education, free libraries, and the Workmen’s Compensation Act), and the overpriced demands of the rich for rent picking its left pocket, "there is not the slightest prospect of his being able to live up to his present standard of comfort for more than one generation."\(^{31}\) In 1912, this was a delightful prospect for West because it would, she believed, force women to

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 104-05.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 113.
go out and work for a living. Thus middle-class women would have to give up their parasitical status. While lower class-women were too exhausted to rally for women's rights, middle-class women were disinclined to disturb the status quo. Now, according to West, the system that created the middle-class would essentially destroy it.

Charity was no substitute for a revolt against the social system. "Charity is an ugly trick. It is a virtue grown by the rich on the graves of the poor."32 Accompanied by a sincere attempt to change the system, charity would not be marred by hypocrisy. Otherwise, it was little more than an attempt to cover the abuses that a few had perpetrated on a great many. Women in particular, West said, knew the evils of charity. Civilization had thrown them alms since the beginning of time. "On the way to business men give women their seats in the tube, and underpay them as soon as they get there."33 The poor fare no better. A rich man who has spent his life in selling adulterated food to the poor can contribute to a hospital, buy a title, and earn the respect of many. Such hypocrisy represented to West the worst kind of immorality.

West seemed to revel in irreverence. She admonished

32Ibid., 127.
33Ibid., 128.
not only women, but all people, to observe carefully their lives to determine if their governing laws were their own or the dictates of an unjust system. The only immorality in one’s life was to give up one’s own values, integrity, or self-respect. In 1913 West shocked genteel London society and the Anglican church by delighting in the scantily clad Mile. Gaby Deslys and her dance troop. Disgusted by the church’s declaration of immorality, she insisted that the only immorality to be reckoned with was the ill-clad mother of four who had not enough clothes even to find work. “Now, is that not indecent?” she asked. West’s moral indignation can be sensed even more adamantly when on 20 June 1913 she wrote what was in essence a eulogy for Emily Davison. Davison died from injuries suffered when she threw herself in front of the King’s horse at the Derby to protest the government’s refusal to grant women the vote. She had been jailed eight times for speaking her conviction; she went on hunger-strikes seven times and was forcibly fed forty-nine times. And this, West laments, “is the kind of life to which we dedicate our best and kindest and wittiest women.”

West pinned her hopes for change on the Labour Party. It was to be one of her major disappointments

*Ibid., 230.
*Ibid., 179.
that what she saw as the inherent possibilities of socialism were not to be realized. By October, 1912 she began to attack the Labour party for having sold its soul. Labour's brand of socialism, she described, as a jellyfish lying atop the Liberal party. The red-veined skeletal structure was visible but the body, obscured by the Liberals, was left as nothing more than a murky and flaccid reflection of Labour policy. The Liberal government, in 1912, had before it the Franchise and Registration Bill, as well as, the Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment Bills. All of these proposed pieces of legislation created great dissention within the Liberal party. This disunity among Liberals opened the way for Labour and Irish representatives to sway the balance in favor of women's suffrage. Ramsay MacDonald had pledged the Labour party, to support the cause of votes for women to the point of accepting funds from the National Union for the purpose of electing pro-suffrage Labour members of Parliament. With the Labour party supporting enfranchisement and the Liberals divided, the swing vote rested with the possible 40-60 Irish votes. The Irish however, were reluctant to weaken the already divided Liberal party while the Home Rule Bill was before Parliament. In addition, some anti-suffrage members of the Liberal party

*Ibid., 110.*
made it clear to the Irish that the passage of the Franchise Bill to include woman suffrage could cause the resignation of Asquith, perhaps doing irreparable damage to their cause. West, whose father was Irish, and who denounced imperialists by placing them into one of two categories -- "imperialists and bloody imperialists" -- was always in favor of home rule for Ireland. She did, however, denounce John Redmond, leader of the Irish Party, for being as short-sighted as the English men. Irish women were almost more deserving of the vote than English women, West believed, because they were more concerned with the business of life. By this she meant that Irish women did much more of that nation's work, than did Englishwomen, because Ireland was agricultural. "The Irishwoman deserves her vote, for she is not a luxury, but a working partner in the firm." To ignore this, West felt, would bring "a sad end to a noble cause."

The Irish Party was no more willing to throw in their lot with the Englishwomen's plight than they were to grant their own women equality. Thus, through a series of suspicious legislative maneuverings the Speaker "passed to the Government his view that, should the Bill emerge from Committee containing a Suffrage clause, he would be bound

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Ibid., 12.

Ibid., 116.
to insist on it being withdrawn and redrafted." This "farce" provided Asquith with a convenient way out of an inconvenient situation. The Labour party, in conference at Lambeth, reacted with respectable furor and then decided to break the pledge MacDonald had issued on their behalf to turn out the Government if they failed to produce votes for women. West said:

They unanimously -- for George Landsbury was not present -- decided neither to turn out the Government for its refusal to adopt woman suffrage nor even to vote against the third reading of the Franchise Bill. The National Executive, which represents the movement throughout the country, wanted them to keep their pledge. There was no pressure on them to commit this dishonour. They contrived it out of their own hearts.*

Indeed, Labour failed to stand for the principles upon which it was created. The Bill, as it stood, did not call for the enfranchisement of only propertied woman, and thus could not be rejected on those grounds. It was the last pre-war chance to secure suffrage. West felt that socialism had been betrayed. In fact, her ideas of social equality and economic justice would never be realized under either socialism or capitalism. West consistently identified herself with movements that were

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West, *The Young Rebecca*, 107.
new and radical, and as yet untried. The reality or implementation of these programs often drew as vicious an attack as those she made on the problems they attempted to solve. West was consistently a thorn in the side of the Labour party, placing it in good company with both the Liberals and Conservatives. She had almost nothing kind to say about the Fabian society either, despite the fact that she joined it in 1912. That her current lover, H.G.Wells, was among the leadership seemed irrelevant.

Among all British socialists she detected two notable vices. The first was their desire to "save souls against their will," and second was a lingering anti-feminism. The later was to her the greatest evil because the "magic of socialism" came when men and women free from the oppression of poverty "really express themselves in their actions." Idealistically, she hoped that some sort of new philosophy of life and art could be possible if this "magic" could ever be actualized. West saw evidence of hostility toward what she believed to be a principle for which socialism had always stood--equality of the sexes. The Labour party had consistently espoused equality. Thus, they had gained from using the talents of Mary Macarther, Eleanor Marx, and Beatrice Webb, among others. However in 1912 Labour held the fate of the government in

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{Ibid., 147.}\]
Its hands and failed in its ability to gain votes for women. Labour was unwilling to show either spirit or independence from the Liberal party. As West noted, anti-feminism is "banished from the brains of the movement, but [is] occasionally visible when the apeman in us stirs himself." \(^2\)

West continued to write, which was her means of protest and expression. Her articles for Fleet street newspapers, which began in 1912, increased as the decade progressed. By 1915 she was contributing not only to the *Daily News* but had also written for the *Daily Herald*, *Everyman*, *Manchester Daily Dispatch* and the *Daily Chronicle*. The targets of her wrath remained consistent, along with the high quality of her criticism. She did noticeably begin to move away from Christabel Pankhurst and the position stated in the *Suffragette*, the official organ of the movement. This shift came primarily because she sensed a disdain in these Suffragists towards men, simply because they were men. West shunned this blind prejudice that took hold of a significant group within the women's rights movement. She would not accept Pankhurst's idea that men practice licentiousness while women merely suffer it. This smacked of the old notion that women were not able to control significant areas of

\(^2\)Ibid., 148.
their own lives. This attitude, West believed, was as destructive to the attempt women were making to have others recognize their personal power as it was discriminatory to men. West's barb directed at Christabel Pankhurst was not only accurate but it summarized her own motivations; "One must love humanity before one can save it."²³

Rebecca West was above all else a humanist. When any movement or cause began to overshadow the rights and interests of the individual she raised a warning flag. This attitude accounted for many of the seeming inconsistencies in her life. While she remained devoted to socialism during the First World War, she quickly thereafter drew away from it: "Since I am a socialist," she wrote in the Daily Chronicle in 1916, "the war has brought but few surprises to me except its vastness and its cruelty."²⁴ West was pleased with the uniformity with which "all socialist movements turned to the benefit of England in her hour of crisis."²⁵ In fact, the war seemed to solidify her belief that socialism could be practiced effectively outside times of peace. She expressed the fear that under the strain of war the

²³Ibid., 203.
²⁴Ibid., 390.
²⁵Ibid., 392.
capitalist system might find some new sanction. With the revolutions in Russia and Germany, however, capitalism appeared weaker than ever.

West had no trouble in lending her full support to warring Britain. While she continued to criticize the government, her patriotism never waned. Germany was the greater evil because its aggression existed to support a monarchial institution that robbed men of their freedom. Indeed, she hoped that England would use the opportunity of war to throw off that which hindered it. "For it has always been our [socialist] faith that the [English] people are capable of every sort of splendid living, and that in consequence not one of them should be allowed to be thwarted and maimed by poverty."^1 A socialist state, she dreamed, would provide food and clothing for all children and give them the educations that suited their particular gifts. Then England would find herself in the advantageous position of having many more able administrators to choose from. "As it is we choose our governors from conspicuous members of the small upper and middle classes with the uneasy consciousness that under the capitalist system conspicuousness can be purchased."^2

^1Ibid., 390.

^2Ibid.
West was confident enough in 1916 to declare that "so far the war has confirmed me in socialism."**® Not many years later she radically changed her view. Perhaps no single event was responsible. Certainly she was immune from any forceful argument in favor of capitalism. No doubt the light of experience moved Rebecca West. Holding firm to her faith in humanity's ability to crush its death instinct in favor of life, she widened the range of possibilities from which this could be done. In 1925 Emma Goldman published My Disillusionment in Russia to which West wrote the introduction. While she expressed enormous admiration for Goldman she found no material for "admiration or imitation in the Bolshevist Government." In fact, she encouraged socialists, to whom she refers as "they," to be men enough to stand up to the results that the triumph of their cause had brought them. It was, she reminded them, always easier to be in opposition than to be in power."** She would comment almost sixty-five years later that it had been the Bolsheviks who destroyed socialism's inherent possibilities.**® From the perspective of hindsight she claimed never to have supported

**®Ibid., 391.

**Goldman, My Disillusionment in Russia, introduction, West, v-ix.

**®REDS, Rebecca West as living witness, directed by Warren Beatty, Paramount Pictures, 1981.
them in their attempt to seize control of Russia and, indeed, her early writing bears that out.

In 1933 West wrote a tribute to Emmeline Pankhurst entitled "A Reed of Steel." Her explanation of Mrs. Pankhurst's repudiation of all she had fought for in her youth is telling. Perhaps West illuminated her own deep processes when she said Mrs. Pankhurst "saw it better to camp among the ruins of capitalism than to push out into the unchartered desert."\(^{51}\) The enfranchisement of women did not precipitate an economic revolution. The vote for women did not feed the poor. She became aware that "economic revolution was infinitely more difficult and drastic than the fiercest political revolution."\(^{52}\) Mrs. Pankhurst, with her "childlike honesty" and "hate of pretentiousness" failed to conceal her perplexity. Rebecca West was not stymied by her own perplexity, however, and went on in search of the pieces to the puzzle that would help her read the "riddle of the universe."

The pattern of her early career continued throughout her life. She remained a better social critic than social


\(^{52}\)Ibid., 261.
reformer. That is not to say that she did not actively participate in the struggle to gain votes for women, only that her most positive and contributory role came as one who could see more clearly from afar. She once wrote of an industrial woman she met that "every sentence she spoke bit into the truth." The same may be said of West. With all her irreverence and derogatory witticism, she spoke the truth about her society. She spoke with stunning originality and bluntness and with the deepest and most sincere concern for the country she loved. In the decade that followed, West devoted her energies more to the writing of fiction, while moving away from an active political involvement. At the same time she developed a philosophy of life, rooted in the value of art, that would serve as the basis of her own career as a writer.

West, The Young Rebecca, 115.
CHAPTER IV

"THE STRANGE NECESSITY"
HOPE IN ART

Rebecca West knew instinctively that art mattered. She wrote for reasons that went beyond the need to make a living. The evolution of her artistic theory is evidence of the fact that West believed art to be one of the most vital aspects of life. While with continuing development her philosophy of art became more sophisticated it did not move away from the fundamental idea that art promotes the life instinct within us and therefore should be cherished. From the first set of poems she published at the age of twelve through the last book published during her lifetime, which was a reflective look at the turn of the century, West used her creative instinct to understand and, thereby, master her own experience. Her philosophy was rooted in the belief that if art could investigate all experience then man could understand all of life and control his own destiny.1 Art was the

1West gave voice to this belief in many of her publications. She most clearly expressed it in The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1928); A Letter to a Grandfather (London: Hogarth Press, 1933); and Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia 2 vols. (New York: Viking Press, 1941).
collective means of storing perceptions. Death would surely come to all men but art was imperishable. It lived to tell succeeding generations of humanity what information been discovered previously. It thereby defied death.

West published, in 1916, a critical study of Henry James. Although the book sold only 600 copies it brought her a great deal of attention. Some thought it impertinent that a twenty-three year old dared to criticize the master, particularly so near his death. Others thought it one of the best critical studies undertaken in the language. Within *Henry James* one may see the germs of thought that thirteen years later would be superbly presented in her most complete essay on art, "The Strange Necessity." In all of her criticism she scrutinized two primary areas: the author's skill in exercising his craft and utilizing his medium, and how well his art served life.

James, she said, displayed a technical genius that allowed him to rise above the careless craftsmanship of the Victorian writers before him. West believed that the use of language represented one of the ways humanity might liberate itself. Language was one of the valuable
ways in which experience was preserved. Certainly it was the vehicle that gave wings to the author's storehouse of perceptions, perceptions that might, if set down honestly, have a bearing on man's relation to the universe. While West praised James for his craftsmanship she took him to task for neglecting his responsibility as an artist. He failed to become an active participant in life and thus seemed to perceive events in a slightly distorted manner. He was never quite able to understand the drama America was acting out nor was he in touch, in the deepest sense, with the European pulse. According to West this was because he relished too much the role of observer. This role stifled the artist because it failed to express primary emotion, which was the stuff of life. West stated that perhaps the real meaning of the New Testament beatitude, blessed are the pure in heart, "may be no more than an expression of the obvious truth that he who receives the fullest impression of the world is likely to react most valuaby to it."  


4Ibid., 95.
The artist, West believed, had a moral responsibility to survey the whole field of human experience. He need not be an activist since a certain amount of quietude is necessary for his work. But he does have the responsibility to know the reality about him, so that he might attempt to understand and shed light on it. The artist must, in fact, push back the frontiers of knowledge and experience so that within society as a whole there might be advancement. A few years later she said art should be encouraged "not in order that it should confirm our existing morality, but that it should run ahead of us and illuminate experience in such a way that we can amplify and modify that morality." James's work evidenced a particular "moral" stagnancy when dealing with female characters. He stated that "the life of a woman is essentially an affair of private relations." Thus, within his female characters he embued a sense of helplessness and ineptness in their dealings outside of the home. In so doing, West said, "he refused to dramatise in his imagination anything concerning women".

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*West, Henry James, 85.*
save their failure and successes as sexual beings."

West would become more adamant and eloquent in her position that the artist's responsibility to help humanity move beyond its present state was paramount if society was to advance to a healthy state.

One is left with the impression while reading Henry James that West wrote with the conscious thought that discovering the faults of "the master" might provide her with a strong foundation from which to launch her own less flawed career. Writing this book seemed to move her in two significant ways. It moved her in the direction of experience. One might even say that her life indicates, at given points, a systematic attempt to place "experiences" within the primary repertoire of her life in order that she might become the consummate artist. That is not to say that she had any more influence over the course of events than any one else. It is to suggest, however, that when given the choice West might have opted for the difficult or dramatic for the sake of a good plot. Perhaps more important, though, West discovered for herself, in concrete terms, why art mattered. Her explanation would become more precise and even scientific.


*G.E. Hutchinson, Sterling Professor Emeritus of Zoology, Yale University, interviewed by author, 28 July 1987, tape-recorded, New Haven, CT.*
but never more accurate than when she wrote in *Henry James*: "There is in humanity an instinct for ritual, there lies in all of us a desire to commemorate our deep emotions, that would otherwise glow in our bosoms and die down forever, by some form that adds to the beauty of the world."

Within the decade of the 1920s West published her most important essays on art. Professionally she spent a great deal of her time playing the role of critic. Analyzing the work of others led her naturally to gather her thoughts into a cohesive whole. It was the trademark of her mind to gather aimless and wandering ideas into a permanent construct that provided order. For a brief time in 1919 she served as theater critic for *Time and Tide*. She found the theater too boring during that period to continue this task, but she did continue her relationship with the magazine, serving as an editorial director and occasional contributor for over thirty years. In 1920, West began the series entitled "Notes on Novels" for *The New Statesman*. Frank Swinnerton, in his history of the literature of the period, wrote, "I doubt whether any such brilliant reviews of novels were ever seen before; they certainly have not been seen since, for when Rebecca West left *The New Statesman* her peculiar

combination of wit could not be replaced. Some of the caricatures and commentaries for The New Statesman were later published together as Lions and Lambs with David Low.

This series ended in 1922 when West left on a lecture tour of the United States. She began many important relationships while in America, not the least of which was a curious love affair with the country itself. Of more immediate importance, though, were the contacts she made with American publishers. She agreed to write a series of articles for the New York Herald Tribune and additionally to visit the United States twice a year. The series was published between 1926 and 1932 and brought her much publicity. She made a similar contract with the Bookman, writing a series of travel sketches/reviews from various places in Europe entitled "A Letter From Abroad." A partial compilation of these articles was published in 1931 under the title Ending in Earnest. West contributed to many other publications during this decade, particularly those American magazines owned by the Hearst corporation, with whom she had yet another contract. It must also be mentioned that she wrote three novels during this decade. The Judge, (1922),

and Harriet Hume (1929), were West’s fairly successful attempts to practice the philosophy of art she was working out in her criticism. Sunflower, also written during this period was not published until after her death.11

The Strange Necessity, published in 1928, certainly must be considered as a cornerstone in the thought of Rebecca West. Practically everything else she wrote relates to it in one way or another. Once she had determined that art mattered because it increased the sum of human knowledge and served as a means of perpetuating that understanding to those not yet born, then all areas were open to her. Whether she studied history or psychology, her talent with language allowed her to create art and thus to contribute to the attempt by human beings to understand what is about them. “The Strange Necessity,” the title essay of the book, makes up over half the book, which also includes literary essays taken mainly from articles first published in the New York

11Sunflower was a novel whose characters closely resembled Max Aiken, Lord Beaverbrook, and West, herself. Beaverbrook wrote a disapproving letter to her, discouraging publication, when he heard of the project. As well, she was warned by Gladys Stern that she would not want to sustain, professionally or privately, the wrath of Beaverbrook. As West was a frequent contributor to his newspapers, she chose not to have the novel published. It was not among her best novels, at any rate.
"The Strange Necessity" a contemplation of art, centers around a day she spent in Paris. This technique pays tribute to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, written around a single day in Dublin, which is the central focus of the essay. Having just left a bookstore in Paris where she purchased a small book of Joyce's poems called *Poems Penveach*, West read one which she said, was noticeably bad, yet it struck her as enormously important. Within the eight lines of the poem she found some commonality with Joyce: "he had ceased to belong to that vast army of our enemies, the facts we do not comprehend; he had passed over and become one of our friends..."¹² These thoughts led her naturally into a consideration of Joyce's classic work *Ulysses*. In typical fashion, West organized the essay in such a way that she elaborated for quite some time on why the poem was so bad before returning to the theme that Joyce was a great "genius." The fact that Joyce had written this poem so many years earlier and still it survived, despite his having had many years in which to lose it, prompted West to declare that, "Mr. James Joyce is a great man who is entirely without taste."¹³

¹³Ibid., 15.
On a more serious note West gave thought to what, precisely, made a bad work of art. Art is, at least in part, a matter of the communication to the audience of an emotion felt by the artist. The "true artist" or "non-sentimental artist," is able to perform this communication with little or no trouble, since giving formal expression to a work of art is to interpret one's experience to oneself, "so that one merely permits the audience to look over one's shoulder." To condition the expression of the experience with regard to the audience is to manipulate the truth of that experience. If an artist writes or paints or composes to create an effect, instead of to render an account of the value of the experience to himself, then his art does not perform its highest function. It cannot then confirm the individual's experience and lend meaning through increased understanding of the universe or of one's self. West stated again and again that works of art should be encouraged not in order to confirm man's existing morality but that man might improve that morality through increased understanding. 

West believed that Joyce had treated himself before he treated his material. Thus, his poem and parts of

* "Ibid., 18.
* "Ibid., 17-19.
*Ulysses* were poor art because they did not represent the author's researches into some problem or experience of his own. In Joyce's case his worst work was artificial or sentimental because it represented his attempt to escape the influence of his classical training. West supported her position by citing Joyce's use of obscenity along with his use of incoherence. The first she minded only because it seemed forced, as if Joyce were fulfilling some childhood wish to shock. The stream of consciousness West decried because most human beings do not perceive phenomena in a way that can be conveyed by isolated words and phrases. Sentences, West stated, were fundamental to all language and therefore most readers would be unable to relate to this form of communication. It was not that she denied the existence of nonsense or the propriety of its use for the character of Leopold Bloom, but she felt that Joyce was more interested in technique than in the force of reality that Bloom could display.  

Nevertheless, West declared that, "Leopold Bloom is one of the greatest creations of all time: that in him

something true is said about man." He was representative of mankind's dual nature. "Simply he stands before us, convincing us that man wishes to fall back from humanity into the earth, and that in that wish is power, as the facade of Notre Dame stands above us, convincing us that man wishes to rise from humanity into the sky, and that in that wish is power."

West recognized that the struggles of the characters, their relationships, even their very existence, contained an eternal beauty; "beauty of the sort whose recognition is an experience as real as the most intense personal experiences we can have, which gives a sense of personal reassurance, of exultant confidence in the universe, which no personal experience can give."  

In this vein, West compared the artist to the soldier in attempting to describe the critics responsibility in this process. "The artist cannot tell you exactly what happened, any more than the soldier in a battle can tell you exactly what has happened. There is a need for an outside observer who will stand clear and

1. Ibid., 43.  
2. Ibid., 44.  
3. Ibid., 50.
look down as from a height."\(^{21}\) Any outside observer or critic will have some inner conflict, some limitation of his own, and thus, his description of the artist's conflicts will be tainted. It is necessary, therefore, that the work of art and the criticism be followed by yet another who attempts to correct the fallings of the first and offer an even more correct interpretation than given originally. This process should continue insuring that an even higher order of intelligence and perception be applied, thus enabling a more profound understanding of the work of art in question. The critic thus helps "the wisdom of the artist live longer than the grasses of the field which are cut down in the fall of the year."\(^{22}\) This process was necessary for the same reason, she argued, that art was a vital necessity for a quality life. It had the potential to reveal the universe and man's relation to it.

Once West established that *Ulysses* had revealed to her truths and created emotions that gave her a sense of the human continuum, she proceeded to another question that had struck her during her day in Paris. While pondering *Ulysses*, West had purchased some hats and a

\(^{21}\)Ibid., 265-66.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 266.
black lace dress, had received some letters from people she was very fond of, and had gone to see a lawyer about some investments. She became conscious that some of these actions caused in her feelings similar to those she had while reading *Ulysses*. The black lace dress and the letters from friends apparently satisfied her soul in some necessary way. To understand this connection, she felt, might shed light on the concept of necessity as it relates to the "needs of the soul." West remembered another work of art that produced in her a similar effect, Ingres "Portrait of the Young Man." How is it, she asked, that two such dissimilar works as those of Ingres and Joyce, could produce "the most intense and happy emotion?" Why is it that art matters? What was that strange necessity?

The necessity for art stems from the most basic instinct in mankind: the instinct to live. The instinct to live requires that man learn what surrounds him. But while man must "accept the duty to live for some unspecified time," he must also accept the duty to die at some unspecified time. Thus man, himself, becomes the battleground for these two opposing forces. The

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23 Ibid., 56.
24 Ibid., 58.
Individual must discover what this conflict means and how the various forces manifest themselves. Even if he strives for life in all things, he must be imbued with a certain amount of the will to die, for he must reconcile himself to the fact that his death hangs in the precarious balance of life. The need to know about the universe, necessitated by the will to live, causes the individual, consciously or unconsciously, to take "elaborate notes" on his own behavior and the workings of the external forces. As a result, he constructs a working hypothesis of life.²³

Because of the subjective nature of his information, this construct will more likely be a fantasy that "stands not a dog's chance of corresponding with reality. Nevertheless it will be cherished by the individual with what intensity is in him. . . ."²⁴ The artist, she insisted, can live comfortably with this disparity because his art will permit him innumerable contacts with the symbols of his fantasy. Good art, she continued, "is the product of a powerful nature that has been able to form an interesting and intricate fantasy or which is able to prosecute with spectacular vigor the effort to

²³Ibid., 59-60.
²⁴Ibid., 61.
make the fantasy and reality match." An artist who translates into the medium of one of the arts the material towards which his fantasy directs his attention, passing it through his own emotional system honestly and sincerely without falsification, becomes free of senti- mentality and thus produces good art. If in that "authen- tic state" it possesses beauty, it is a work of art. West quoted David Hume that beauty is no quality in things themselves; "it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them." 

The pleasure or sense of understanding caused in the non-artist by the artistic experience comes from a recognizable design. Perceptions about life and the universe held by one are confirmed by the other. This confirmation, or "collision of forces," links agents that may be worlds apart into the human continuum. Art then, is at least in part, a way of collecting new information about the universe and confirming existing experience and information. While the artistic experience often transcends gender, there are, according to West, "bricks in the universe known exclusively to women" and "bricks" known exclusively to men. There must be in female

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Ibid., 65.

Ibid., 67.
artists a determination to build up works of art out of the bricks known only to women. Because of the human need for empathy, humans read and receive feelings from the artist. Women, according to West, have had historically fewer means by which to validate their feelings. West would take this subject up in greater depth a few years later.

Because art is a storehouse of integrated perceptions that can be utilized to provide information about life and lend direction for successful adaptation, it is also remarkably close to science. West took up a discussion of Pavlov’s Conditioned Reflexes to explain that our responses to art fits into a pattern that somehow lends order to the universe. That life and the universe might be random was anathema to West. Art, she stated, was out to collect information about the phenomena of the universe just as science was, "and its preference to do this by the study of imaginary material shows its loyalty to the scientific spirit." All of the arts were on a perfect equality in their ability to perform this function. Each reveals to us small patterns

Rebecca West, "Woman as Artist and Thinker," in Woman’s Coming of Age: A Symposium, ed. Samuel D. Schmalhausen and V.P. Calverton (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), 381.

West, The Strange Necessity, 118.
of life itself that when synthesized give one a sense of the larger picture. This understanding could endow the individual with the will to live while revealing the mysteries of life and validating and actualizing one's existence. West contended that knowledge of the universe, when extracted through imaginary material was called art. In fact, she suggested that the creation of imaginary characters was "a new and completely justifiable technique which man has invented to deal with material that cannot be put into a test-tube or isolated in a laboratory." Both art and science attempt to select out of the whole complexity of the universe those units which are of significance to the individual, and to integrate those units into that which excites further living.

West was convinced that art, as a storehouse of knowledge, had the ability to have profound psychological effects on those who exposed themselves to it. In contrast, those who remained distant from their artistic heritage could suffer profoundly. As evidence, West noted artists who created their art while in exile and immigrants to the new world who lost touch with their heritage. It should be remembered that the 1920s was a decade obsessed with understanding the new psychology.

*Ibid., 99.*
West has in her long career never shied away from a psychological analysis when she thought it appropriate but her works of this decade most particularly bring her interest in Freudian psychology into play. *The Strange Necessity*, in some ways, is a book about its own time, although not more than it is a book whose application transcends that decade or any other.

Regarding the immigrant, West spoke of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* where he expressed distrust of Russian emigres for no other reason than that they were emigres. His theory was that it was necessary for "every human being to remain embedded, physically and mentally, in the life of the country in which he was born." West, while at first suspicious found evidence that his conclusions were as sound as Euclid. A man who goes out from his people cannot attain his full growth." Using the examples of exiled artists, in this case, William Butler Yeats, and immigrants to America, particularly Al Capone, West constructed a theory that while difficult to prove was equally difficult to disprove. The basis of her argument rests comfortably in her previously stated philosophy of art. Yeats, while a

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32 Ibid., 138.
33 Ibid., 140.
great poet, seemed to know nothing of life other than what he found for himself. His own power of analysis and synthesis was unequalled but it appeared, to West, that he was:

... cloistered from the knowledge of anyone else's analyses and syntheses. ... When Mr. Yeats, who is supremely wise about his own experience in his poems, looks around him at the world of which his experience is a part and a product, it is apparent from his wild gestures, which are those of a man scrambling to keep his foothold on the sharp tip of a steeple, that he is so unaware of that world as to be practically suspended in nothingness.\(^{34}\)

This was because he did not live among his fellows, in this case countrymen, who were subject to similar experiences in their own unique space and time. Even more destructive to his acquiring a grasp on the universe was the fact that he remained unconnected with his heritage and artistic traditions. Thus, he lived without access to the storehouse of perceptions that were gleaned by his countrymen who had gone before him. In 1926, West edited and wrote the preface to collection of Carl Sandburg's poems. In that preface she attributes Sandburg's greatness to the fact that he was the voice of the American midwest, the region he wrote about. His poetry, she felt, expressed the whole life of the region because he was so deeply rooted in its artistic and

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 154-55.
historical heritage. This was precisely what Yeats lacked.

West used much the same argument when considering Scarface Al Capone. In the 1920s it was perhaps easy for West to make the generalization that immigrants of given countries showed more anti-social characteristics in their adopted country than they would had they remained in their native countries. Italians, Irish, Chinese, and European Jews, all of whom had high incidents of criminal involvement in the United States, came from civilizations that were very highly developed artistically. Without contact with their heritage, they became individuals unlinked to the universe. Capone, West says, was an individual "superbly in possession of the present, who is destitute of the past." The religion of his mother country, which had been thrashed out for two thousand years to meet the needs of his people, was lost to him and thus Capone bounced from experience to experience, deprived of any real guidance. West does not make it clear why some exiles engage in anti-social behavior and others do not, except that some exiles hold extraordinarily tightly to their native traditions, as if

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23West, The Strange Necessity, 159.
to do otherwise would lead to contamination of a sort. And, perhaps, in some ways it did.

This led West to conclude that art is not a luxury, but a necessity. Returning to her original theme, which by this point in the essay seemed considerably obscured, West again focused her attention on Joyce's *Ulysses* and Ingres's "Portrait of the Young Man." The imperative she felt to explore these works in greater depth warned her that a cursory encounter with them would deprive her of an insight that would be pertinent to her experience. West expressed certainty that among her experiences one must bear strong resemblance to Joyce's experience which made him write *Ulysses*.

Either I have not analyzed and synthesized it [the experience] into an excitatory complex, in which case it roams about at the back of my mind, uncontrolled, unprofitable, and possibly mischievous; or I have analyzed and synthesized it into an excitatory complex, in which case I can check up on the soundness of my process, and see what was universal in the form in which this common experience presented itself to me. In doing this the participant in art becomes a participant in life.

While West was an ardent defender of the artist's right to create as complicated a work as honestly suited his need, she was generous in considering many simple

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acts as part of the artistic process. In other words, she supported complexity in art. There was no more reason why a novel should be short and simple than that a painter should paint a small picture. On the other hand, of more significance, she suggested that the action of baking a cake for a dear friend was at the low end of the same scale that included Mozart and Beethoven. Thus art penetrated daily life in a way that recognized the significance of a seemingly minor incident. In so doing, the participant in life also becomes a participant in art. Art provided a framework which, if superimposed onto one's actions, allowed the possibility of comparing human experience and then learning what the universe held for man as agents within it. Art has the power to act as a common bond that allows mankind to fit together the pieces of the whole. "I do not think we can exaggerate the fundamental unity of all art and experience."

West concludes her essay, "The Strange Necessity," by stating that art is imperishable because it is detached from man's perishable body. It was precisely this aspect of art, its immortality, that West found so significant. Because art transcends human restrictions it may become an "unfailing inspiration in this business of living."³⁰

³⁰Ibid., 189.

²⁰Ibid., 193.
West acknowledges that there are more joyful and intoxicating emotions, particularly those derived from love, but the "joy" arising from the artistic experience is perpetual, even from generation to generation. Thus, while it attempts to explain the mysteries of life, art also creates something of a mystery by providing transcendent joy.

While "The Strange Necessity" was West's most complete treatise on art it was certainly not her last. Within the same decade, the 1920s, she explored other artistic thoughts and incorporated them either into articles or novels. For the whole of her career Rebecca West was deeply engaged in the search for truth. Formal religion was never the means by which she drew closest to that which she sought, (though for a time later in her life she did look into formal religion), but she consistently expressed admiration for certain elements in the Church. In 1926, she expressed her views in an article entitled "My Religion," published in a work with the same title edited by Arnold Bennett. In her religion art served the same purpose as the rituals of worship because both were able to draw a

... picture of spiritual facts which human language still finds it difficult to express adequately or in a form equally comprehensible by all kinds of people. When one sees a beautiful church full of worshippers kneeling in attitudes of adoration in front of an altar where a
cardinal, in robes the very colour of power and majesty, abases himself before a cross on which there hangs a naked man who was poor and despised and rejected, one gets a complete expression of a certain group of spiritual ideas that can struggle into words only one aspect at a time.**

In "The Strange Necessity" West expressed the idea that for some individuals the sacraments of worship were such a confirmation of an individual experience "as amounted to its infinite multiplication."** For West, then, art served the same purpose as religion in so far as it was able to confirm the researches of ones soul and portray spiritual concepts.

West's put her theory to the test in a novel she published in 1929, also publication date of The Strange Necessity. Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy incorporates an extreme vision of an individual's life completely devoid of art and another completely saturated in art. While both characters were maladjusted, the male figure, Arnold Condorex, because he lived without art, existed in a world where the only reality was material. He had no concept of spiritual truths or of life beyond what he heard, saw, and felt. While an able administrator capable of accomplishing earthly achievements, he was

"West, The Strange Necessity, 54-55.
Incapable of sensing that there existed another realm that lent meaning to life. This inability led him to a less than successful adaptation. Thus, Condorex, the consummate man of the world, eventually committed murder. "True, I was an excellent administrator," he agreed gloomily, "but all the same I feel guilty beside you and your life spent in contemplation of the eternal beauties. Do not forget that I found it impossible to work without surrendering to the principle of negotiation; and that it led me to murder, and logically so." Harriet Hume, on the other hand, was so engrossed in her art that she failed at the business of living. She laments, "I may have been innocent, but I was also impotent. If I had derived a comprehension of harmony from my art, it was a grave lack in me that I could not instill it into others and establish it as the accepted order of life. . . ." Of course, West's characters are merely caricatures of extreme. Her point, however, is deftly conveyed. Man exists precariously between the material and the spiritual worlds. Art and religion provide the means by which man may live wholly this material life while

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"Ibid., 266-67."
Harriet Hume, it should be noted, was also the portrayal of the worst in feminine weakness. While she was a first rate pianist she failed in the artist responsibility to extend consciousness beyond its present limits. A short time after this novel was published West wrote an article entitled "Women As Artist and Thinker." In it she stated, "there have as yet been very few women thinkers and artists, that is to say, women who have not adopted masculine values as the basis of their work." Her point was that women artists should not be explicitly and exclusively feminine, but rather that they should be free to realize their gifts without considering the roles that social definitions of gender impose. Thus, West distinguished between the artist who is female, and the women artist. The women artist has not allowed herself to be merely a mirror in which to reflect life but rather treats her material before treating herself. "She has created herself in the form in which the man-governed modern world, so far as it can be ascertained from its art, thinks women ought to be created."*®

*®West, "Woman as Artist and Thinker," 381.

*®Rebecca West and David Low, "Clemence Dane," in Lions and Lambs (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), 131.
West believed historically that two factors held women back from realizing their potential in this regard: the hymen and the uterus. It is interesting to note that eighteen years later, in 1949, Simone De Beauvoir would use a similar thesis in her more comprehensive work, *The Second Sex*. Both authors contended that the physiology of women contributed in large part to the second class role men put women into. The expectation of the unbroken hymen, which depended on pre-marital chastity, deprived women of a great many experiences not denied to men. This was not to imply that to be a great artist or thinker one must engage in multiple sexual romps. Sexuality was not the only important issue, but this one example illustrated the restrictive mores imposed on women in all areas. Very few women acquired enough knowledge or experience to be "geniuses." To do so was considered at best unfeminine and at worst whorish. Also, women's role as childbearers and primary care-takers demanded from them not less than everything. "Vitality," West stated, "is the root of all mental power." Thus, women historically who were married were

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*West, "Woman as Artist and Thinker," 371.*


*West, "Woman As Artist and Thinker," 374.*
placed at an intellectual and creative disadvantage, because so much of their vitality was drained from them in the process of near perpetual childbirth. West was careful to point out that motherhood was not a liability. In fact, it gave women a special advantage over men who had no equivalent experience. The disadvantage came in the traditional fate of womankind of being forced to bear too many children. Unmarried women were traditionally so limited in the activities they could engage in properly as to be experiencially stymied. West was particularly eager to encourage women to use their gifts because she believed that women were more likely to promote those things that were life-giving. "They [women] put into their pages the conflicts of individuals, and themselves and their environments, but they record them with a preference for harmony rather than revolt which differentiates them from male creators." Women were, of course, capable of violence and silliness and every other human and artistic fault. Thus it was to no one's advantage to throw about useless recriminations. West saw the solution in the process. Women should continue their work, encourage social change, and "go on their way without caring overmuch for the judgments passed on their

— Ibid., 381.
works by men." She remained convinced that "non-neurotic" men would always judge women fairly and vice-versa. Her conclusion seems generous in contrast with the historical survey of oppression earlier in the article. West was not, contrary to some opinions, a misadandrist. What she disliked she disliked equally in men and women.

The subject of art remained forever open for West. Since art was synonymous with hope it was a ready area of thought and conversation. West's argument about the necessity of art extended well beyond the individual need for art into society's communal need for it. In 1930 she wrote "There is a point, and it is reached much more easily than is supposed, where interference with freedom of art and literature becomes an attack on the life of society. This freedom is as necessary to the mental survival of a society as a satisfactory sanitary system is to its physical survival." Notably, the 1930s indicate a change in focus for West. With the value of her work firmly in her consciousness she began to expand her view of reality, reaching out into areas that took

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"Ibid., 382.

Bernard Causton and G. Gordon Young, Keeping It Dark or the Censor's Handbook, with a forward by Rebecca West (London: Mandrake Press, 1930), 7.
her well beyond the role of novelist and critic into areas that desperately needed to be grappled with if society was to survive intact the coming decades.
CHAPTER V

"THE PAST HAS MADE THE PRESENT"
THE CYCLE OF HUMAN HISTORY

The world's enemies became frightfully evident in the 1930s. They were, however, no more than manifestations of those forces Rebecca West had spoken of so often. They were evidence of the awful disposition of man to choose death when he ought to choose life. The physical, metaphysical, and spiritual conflicts of the decade were frequent subjects of hers. Rebecca West found in the dilemmas of that decade the age old conflicts of history. In her literary criticism of the late 1920s she attacked those writers who failed to place events within a historical context. There could be no real understanding of individual or national behavior without exploring the context within which men made choices. Increasingly, West felt the place to find the roots of modern man's difficulties lay in the historical record. Her use of the historical method was unorthodox, to be sure, but effective. She said near the end of her life that she would have liked to have been a historian. Her biographer, to whom she spoke, responded with
surprise that she was a historian. West actually performed the first goal of the historian better than many of those trained in the discipline. If all history is "contemporary history," as Croce declared, then it consists essentially of seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in light of its problems. The main work of the historian is not merely to record but to evaluate; in doing so he learns what is worth recording. The facts of the past are dead, but take on life through the mind of the historian who contemplates them. The past then cannot live unless it mingles with the present. What the historian must do is to investigate what lies behind a particular act or event. There, the highest function of history is realized when one aids in understanding the society of the past while increasing his mastery over the present society.

While West wrote with a pronounced historical consciousness throughout her career, her first formal work of history was published in 1933. The biography of St. Augustine would set down in concrete terms her own world-view with its roots deeply embedded in a distant time. Most important, it set down her profound thinking on the Europe of her own day. Her concern for Europe, generally, and England, specifically, was in evidence

\[ ^2 \text{Glendinning, } \textit{Rebecca West: A Life, } 6. \]
as early as the late 1920s. She expressed specific concern for what she saw as the spiritual bankruptcy of England as a result of the First World War. She referred to it as a "psychic emptiness" which left England in a state of false and hence dangerous hopefulness.² This was in particular evidence when examining literature before and after the war. In a review written in 1929 called "The Dead Hand," she stated, "there is now, due to the very slowly emergent consequences of the war, a very clean-cut division between young and old minds."³ Not only was she referring to a different style of writing but to the more important tendency of the pre-World War I artist to escape into the past. Because the present was distressing the English tendency was to seek refuge by wandering into the past. That was not the tendency of all Europeans because their recent past was not so pleasant as the English. English critics contributed heavily to the success of poor literature because it corresponded to their fantasy of how things should be. "But the average French critic stays where he is and takes what comes; while the average English critic stays where he was and takes what used to come when he was a

³Ibid., 38.
This tendency in literature and criticism spilled over into the English consciousness during the 1930s in a most dangerous way. The political forces that could have and should have budged England out of her "perpetualism" did not. To West English perpetualism was not only the great national stabilizer but also the dreaded national nullifier. West attended an election party in 1929 hosted by one of Britain's wealthiest men and attended by those of his class along with a few artists. The cheering masses outside confirmed to the guests inside that their worst fear had been realized. The Labour party had been returned to power during a period of great economic instability. "The English guests of Mr. Selfridge stood and shook hands and said in the same level tones, 'This is the best party I've ever been at. Well, I suppose we're all ruined now.' Americans said with more animation, 'It certainly has been a wonderful party. But isn't this terribly exciting! Poor old Conservative England!'" West knew very well that the Labour victory would be meaningless because the Party had lost faith in its own formulas to produce change.

"English perpetualism (which the foreigner is apt to

*Ibid., 40.

*IIbid., 116.
mistake for Conservatism) will not fight Socialism, it will permeate it and mitigate it." West felt certain that this tendency towards inertia produced in the British a stagnancy that impeded the progress of a great people. She could not know in 1929 just how firmly committed to the principle of inertia the governments and the populace would be during the coming decade.

While World War I produced in many Englishmen and women a longing for the past it produced in other nations the most intense kind of national hatred. In 1925 West took a trip through central and eastern Europe and saw first hand the results of the Peace Treaty. She visited Innsbruck where the obsession lay not so much in restoring everyday life and the national economy following the war as much as it lay in the desire to reclaim the territories Austria had lost to Italy.

This is sad rankling stuff to get under the skin of a nation. It can in time rot away its life, for it turns all its spiritual forces to daydreaming. Youth, instead of harnessing its energies to the arts and sciences and industries, will indulge in unprofitable fantasies concerning the recovery of that stolen region."

The most important loss to a nation, as it is with an individual, comes when they devote all their energies to

"Ibid., 117.

"Rebecca West, "So This is Peace," The New Republic, March 1925, 37."
revenge. Instead of celebrating, by their national customs, the "eternal joys and sorrows of mankind" which lead to beauty, they become consumed in the temporary maladjustment of territory.

The results of the Peace Treaty in Hungary and in the Balkans were even worse. West commented that the peace had left these people in a chronic condition of hate. It certainly did not take much of a visionary to predict that the situation in Europe could not long endure under those conditions. What West was interested to know was how a nation could work out a system of life which suited its needs. She had constructed her belief regarding the individual's ability to adapt to life and create from it what he needs to manage. Art gave man his best hope of redemption in this life through understanding his environment. This, as well as any other method, gave men a sense of continuity with preceding generations which led to a sense of belonging in the universe. So far as she could tell, no nation had found a way to perform the function on a large scale, that art performed on an individual level, without also leading to destructive nationalism. A great deal of her work in the 1930s dealt directly or indirectly with the question of nations. West never lost as a consuming interest the relationship of an individual to his country or the life of a
nation as it related to other nations.

West saw again and again the propensity in both nations and individuals to choose that which led to destruction. Nations choose war over peace and national expansion no matter what the cost. Individuals chose to hate when other options were available. There can be little doubt, when examining the life of Rebecca West, that she sensed this destructive tendency most particularly in herself. All of this led her quite naturally to an interest in the great saint of the Church, Augustine. She summed up her own motivation in a sentence penned before her work on Augustine was begun. In regard to Tolstoy she said:

He attempts to influence his readers in favor of a thesis dependent on the primitive sense of guilt, and the need for expiation by the endurance and infliction of suffering, which had been forbidden expression above a certain cultural level in the rationalist nineteenth century.®

That she could find in Tolstoy so much of what she found in Augustine is testimony to the prevailing influence of the Church Father. Perhaps, West's own roots in Calvinist Scotland made her perhaps ultra sensitive to this issue.

West poured over the scholarship relating to St. Augustine. Her intention was to write a small book about Augustine's "personal life and background," and that she did very well. But as always with West she could not leave the narrative as a simple description of a life. What made West a historian by nature, if not by training, was her ability to glean from the facts those aspects which are relevant to the lives of men outside of the context of the narrative. In this case West wound up not only giving a quite respectable account of Augustine's psychological and spiritual struggles but, in him, she found the roots of modern man. As well, she demonstrated that the world of Augustine and the Europe of her own day are in a remarkably similar, if not advantageous, situation. She then set down what quality it was that allowed individuals to thrive when all about them there was decay.

West begins this work with a quote from Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage over seventeen hundred years ago, that almost elicits a sense of confusion as to which century is being discussed, so clear is the parallel between the decaying Roman Empire and the Europe of the 1930s. Cyprian stated that the "world has now grown old, and does not abide in that strength in which it formerly stood. . . . Honesty is no longer to be found in the
market-place, nor justice in the law-courts, nor good craftsmanship in art, nor discipline in morals." West understood the feeling that Cyprian evoked, that an "individual might be full of life, . . . but he felt suspended in a medium of death." This, of course was the challenge of her own day as well.

The early Roman Empire had thrived in part because it had given its subjects a measure of freedom in return for their submission. An enterprising peasant could become a landowner. In fact, commoners of every type had considerable opportunities for advancement. The freedom of the will produced positive results in the cultural and economic life of the empire. Under Diocletian and Constantine, however, the rules began to change. West cites the fact that they had been consistently too preoccupied with "violence and compulsion" to institute creative reforms or even to allow for the continuation of systems that permitted a modicum of liberty. Rather they "treated the organic as if it were the inorganic, and made every man a peg stuck in a hole." This defilement of human liberty was bound, according to West, to reek havoc

9 Rebecca West, St. Augustine (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1933; reprinted in Rebecca West: A Celebration, 159.

10 Ibid., 160.

11 Ibid., 162.
within society as a whole. Early in the work West states eloquently the fundamental dilemma of individuals and nations caught within such a society:

Nowhere was there any release for creative energy. Man could not use time in the only way it can serve him; he had no chance to devise a drama in which he could play his part and reveal the character of his self. Since he needed that revelation for his own enlightenment, since without he goes out of the world knowing no more than the beasts of the field of anything beyond his sensations, it was as if his life had been cancelled, as if he had unfairly been given over to death while his flesh still promised him preservation from it. So the children of that age sat in an anguished lethargy.\textsuperscript{12}

It was clear from West’s description that it was not only an autocratic Emperor who had the power to wreak such effects on society but also oppressive economic systems that locked individuals into inelastic positions of employment and mobility. In the Roman world, however, there existed a force that could exercise the power of armies. Christianity held a particularly fascination for a considerable portion of the dispossessed. "At its altar the common man found what was wanting in the secular world."\textsuperscript{13} Christianity returned the individual’s free will. Within a society that now had harnessed the will to a system of virtual bondage, Christianity offered a release from the dictates of temporal powers

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 163.
while affirming the dignity of the average man in the process. Suddenly the power of an idea took on the force of armies. This led inevitably, according to West, to an obsession over religious controversy. Never had so many people been interested in the minute details of theology. Also, because Christianity is a combination of Greek thought and Hebrew ethics and poetry, the population was remarkably well educated in what West considered to be "first-rate material."

This collusion of circumstances led the thinkers of that age into a position unlike that faced by any other age. Those great minds were led predominately into the Church. West supports this point by turning to the "pages of history" where "so swift and complete as to be dramatic, all of the enduring names from the pagan records [are transferred] to the tables of the Fathers of the Church." Those great minds were forced into another unique role by virtue of the temporal power the Church acquired in the third and fourth centuries. Not only were the Church Fathers forced to continue the kind of speculative thinking that would make a tremendous impact in the lives of individuals for centuries to come, but they were also under the obligation of tending to practical matters. These thinkers of the Church did not

"Ibid., 164."
have the luxury of some so engaged to lead a life of quietude. While the "pursuit of fixed truth" was their first duty, they had continually to practice "the most agile opportunism." West says that this division and conflict of function must happen where ever the Church has gained temporal power, but never did it manifest itself so clearly and "picturesquely" as in these two centuries.

That was the world into which Augustine was born. Because Augustine was an African, West explains briefly the religious customs this group brought with them to the altar of Christianity. It becomes particularly important because one of West's personal motivations for writing this work on Augustine was to find the roots of guilt in modern society. That humans seemed to be more drawn to pain than to pleasure was a source of continual interest to West and a confirmation that guilt was one of the strongest motivational forces operating within Western man. This knowledge, in some measure, accounted for her choice of subject. She describes the African gods before the Roman conquest. Baal and Tanit, gods of fertility, dispensed gifts in return for human sacrifice. The cult of Saturn, which replaced Baal and Tanit did not mitigate the need for human suffering. In time the worshippers of these gods moved in mass towards Christianity. West believed that with them they brought "eerie talk of
buying favours from the gods with suffering." Because a large part of Latin Christian literature was written by Africans, she believed that Christianity developed, at this time and from this source, the elements within it that endanger reason.

Rome must have become familiar within her own doors with Christianity as a troubling secret society that gradually changed into something like a branch of the Civil Service; but from Africa and the East -- and especially from Africa -- must have come the knowledge of Christianity as a powerful threat to reason.  

Augustine was born to a Christian mother and an unbelieving father. He was made acutely aware that he was not only a provincial in his own country but that his country was a mere colony of the Roman Empire. This sense of inferiority was exacerbated, according to West, by the difficult relationship between his parents and himself. It must be remembered that West wrote this biography during the height of Sigmund Freud's influence, which came in the 1920s and 1930s. Rebecca West was greatly interested in Freud and his ideas, no doubt in part to explain her own rather troubled childhood and relationship with her father. Augustine regarded his

*Ibid., 165.

*Ibid.

father as a force against which he must protect his mother and himself. Not that Patricius was a bad man, only that Augustine felt he was an intrusion into the most significant relationship of his entire life: that between his mother and himself. West spends considerable time examining the relationship between Augustine and Monica. While there is no doubting that Monica was a devout Christian, part of her desire that her son unite with the Church was so that he could remain her son without becoming a man. This rather unnatural relationship with each parent coupled with the Roman Empire having conquered his people presented Augustine with two alternatives, according to West.

Would he keep to the world of men, and in the field of action or pagan letters become such a great man that his father looked little beside him, that it would become apparent that there was no base alloy in him and a subject race could produce masters, that Carthage would forget he was a squireen's son and Rome forget he was an African? Or would he turn his back on the world of men and pass into another world which denied the standards of Patricius, Carthage, Rome, and presented him with another standard that, if he accepted it, would raise him at one step above the greatest man in Rome, would utterly condemn the accomplishments of civilization, and indeed reward him for lacking them, and what was more, would insure him pre-eminence in the future life as well as in this?

West saw that Augustine had the opportunity to make these choices because she had already determined that he

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1West, St. Augustine, 171.
was one of the greatest of all writers. He was timeless because he worked in the "same introspective field as the moderns." One is never sure when reading Saint Augustine if West admired the man or despised him. It may be one of her strongest assets as an historian that she is able to glean from the writings of an individual his greatness as an artist or thinker while pointing out in some detail how this individual manifests the same flawed nature that plagues all members of the human race. West was never understated in her attempt to comprehend the full nature of a person, because she understood very well that modern man's suppositions were the compilation of generations of other individuals' thought.

Augustine's choice, as he reached manhood, did not include the Church. He decided to become a rhetorician which allowed his imaginative mind no room for exercise. As his Confessions progress he adopts an increasingly hostile attitude to both art and sex. It is significant that West, in this work, expands her thinking on art while examining the life of Augustine. She becomes more convinced that art is life-giving by studying the Saint's resentment towards it. Art, says West, is bound to come under the censorship of man's sense of guilt, which holds suspect any activity not directed towards expiation.

Ibid., 165.
because it is a source of pleasure. Additionally, art "is bound to incur the disapproval of the death-wish we all have in varying degrees, since by analysing experience it makes us able to handle experience and increase our hold on life." Augustine found art to be a powerfully negative example because it aroused in the audience feelings of an "unprofitable type." West believed this antipathy stemmed from more than the sense of pleasure art aroused. Inherent in his attitude was the effect of the political situation he found himself in.

Again West draws the analogy between Augustine and Tolstoy. The reader is lead to believe that it is no coincidence that Tolstoy's *What is Art?* is remarkably similar to the sentiments of the African Saint fifteen hundred years earlier. While maintaining that Augustine's views are clearly more sophisticated and logically presented than Tolstoy's, there are fundamental similarities that stem primarily from the fact that both these men found themselves on the fringes of the civilization of their day. Once again, West ties together the importance of the life of the individual with the life of the nation. Her views in this regard reached full maturity in her *magnum opus*, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, where she explained much of the national

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20Ibid., 177.
life of the South Slavs as a consequence of their cultural life. In that regard, West contends that Augustine, as a citizen of a conquered nation, was almost trapped into subjugating the culture of his native land. Thus, he was forced into applying the standards of the conquerors to the art of his people. Since no people can create true art by applying the standards of another people, the result is artificial. The conquering nation will never consider the creation anything but inferior and it will not fulfill the promise of art to press ahead and discover yet unformulated truths: the process that would make it valuable to the creating group.

Augustine, not wanting to admit to the Romans that they had effectively destroyed the creative impulse of the Africans, choose to nullify the importance of art by finding it spiritually reprehensible. Thus, he achieved moral authority over the conquerors. This attitude necessarily limits art to fulfilling a particular function. In the case of Augustine, as it was to be with Tolstoy, the only valuable and legitimate art was that which related art to morality and the communication of religious sentiment. And this, according to West, is what authentic art never is.

Thus, the imaginative mind of Augustine was lost, at least for a time. He was not successful as a rhetorician
or as a philosopher. He was disenchanted with the Holy Scriptures in the crude Latin version then available, when it was compared with the polish of the pagan works he loved and loathed at the same time. Therefore, says West, with what must have been a fairly conscious choice, he turned to Manicheanism which came neither from Rome or Africa nor from his mother or father. Manicheanism holds that the framework of world conflict and world redemption turns on the opposition of good and evil; these are identified with light and darkness. God is the ruler of the Kingdom of Light and Satan the Ruler of the Kingdom of Darkness. A terrible struggle goes on between these forces which involves the life of man. Man is expected to live in such a way that the light that is in him will make its way to God, and the darkness consigned to hell. The liberation of light is obtained by ascetic purity and is retarded by idolatry, impurity in action, speech, or thought, the destruction of life, and sexual intercourse. While man may release particles of light through purity, he was constantly confronted with the dark substance of life as it exists on the earth. Therefore, West observed, man is a being divided against himself.\(^2\)\(^1\) The release of light has been aided by the true prophets, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Zoroaster, Buddha.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 179-180.
Christ, Paul, and Mani the founder of the religion. When all the particles of light are released the kingdoms will separate once and for all, but the Kingdom of Darkness will continue to exist since it is a part of reality. This type of dualism is often manifest within the works of West, herself. Her critics have accused her of embracing Manicheanism by accepting that material as evil. Molra Ferguson particularly attacks West's admiration of Augustine and believes that that indicates her wholesale acceptance of his Manicheanistic Christianity. It is difficult to interpret West correctly in this regard because so much of what she wrote differed from what she did. She accuses Augustine of disregarding pleasure as the standard by which to live, yet, she appeared often to abandon that principal herself. What should be said is that West wrote, as she many times declared, to understand what it was she knew and what was important to know. While her literary style is authoritative, her works are investigatory rather than definitive. Her interest in Augustine stemmed from her own struggle with good and evil, light and darkness. It is not true to say, as Ferguson suggests, that in every case she threw over her own pleasure principal in favor of painful

Ferguson, "Feminist Manichaenism : Rebecca West's Unique Fusion," 53-55.
atonement. Her admiration of Augustine stems from his nature as a Romantic artist rather than from his role as the father of predestination.

That this type of story has continued to exist age after age proves, according to West, proves that it corresponds with the basic fantasy of men's minds.

Moreover, it has the practical advantage of presenting the ordinary human being with a hypothesis which explains the extraordinary and unpleasant things which are constantly happening to him externally and internally and suggests that all is going well as can be expected.\(^{23}\)

West believed that Augustine was not completely devout in his practice of this religion, nor was he alert to the inconsistent elements within the religion. Perhaps, she suggests, the greatest influence it exerted on Augustine was the "recognition of dualism as a source of distress which he imported into Christianity."\(^{24}\)

While he remained a Manicheanist for nine years his spirit was restless and discontented. Eventually he made his way to Christianity and along with his conversion came reconciliation with his mother. Monica immediately began making plans for her son which included, before he was baptized, choosing a wife with ample patrimony. This feat done, Augustine sent away his

\(^{23}\)West, *St. Augustine*, 180-81.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 181.
mistress of fourteen years and his son, seeking rather to be "comfortably supported" by a woman with money enough that he might lead a "cultured existence." For this and other reasons, West stated: "This fundamental determination to take and not to give explains why he never performed any action during his seventy-six years which could possibly be held up as a pattern for ethical imitation." Shortly thereafter he put his new wife away, as well, while he began the kind of spiritual pursuits that would make him a Doctor of the Church and a Saint.

Following his baptism, Augustine committed himself to a contemplation of spiritual matters. He felt some urgency to prove beyond all doubt that the invisible universe existed. Beyond that, there was, he felt, a need to understand the substance and workings of that universe. For three years he devoted himself to these issues in relative quietude. Then, as in his age frequently happened, this man of thought was called into action. Involuntary episcopacy was at the time a common but unpleasant practice, whereby, a community could lure a wealthy or otherwise attractive individual into its area and then use force to make him swear an

Ibid., 192.

Ibid., 191.
oath to remain and to perform the duties of bishop.
Augustine fell prey to this practice in the coastal city of Hippo. He traveled to Hippo to help a potential convert, with the knowledge that Hippo already had a bishop. The citizens of Hippo were little detoured by this fact and forced Augustine to become a presbyter against his will. He was latter consecrated a bishop.

Augustine served the city of Hippo well, carrying out his priestly duties diligently. More important, however, he began to formulate the doctrines for which he has become so well known. West discusses Augustine’s theology with the knowledge that those ideas have had a jarring impact on the civilization of not only his day but of hers as well. West is at her best when she writes with this knowledge. Augustine insisted that faith should precede reason. He contended that it was not necessarily consistent that the rational mind would eventually see the truths of religion simply because they were true. West credits him with being keenly aware of the existence of the unconscious mind. Thus, an individual may very well not arrive at "proper" religious truths by the use of reason. He may, in fact, do nothing more than rationalize away a serious error as Augustine, no doubt, felt he had done in his own youth. Once the individual was grounded in faith he then could be trusted
to use his reason for good.

Thus, Augustine had the greatest confidence in his own ability to formulate the truths of Christianity. He had submitted his reason to his faith, thereby allowing faith to speak through reason. He had little cause to doubt this formula because it closely corresponded to the Biblical paradox that a man must lose his life to gain it. Augustine built upon the foundation that Ambrose had laid and added, according to West, his distinctive passion and experience to it. He portrayed the relationship between God and man as being like that of parents to a child. Thus, he depicted the God-man relationship "as being passionate and eventful and subject to woeful alienation followed by happy reconciliation, like the relationships of the flesh." Man could obtain the position of "reconciliation" only because God was constantly raining down grace on an otherwise filthy human race. Original sin figured prominently in Augustine's estimation of the worth of the individual. The doctrine of predestination followed naturally from his view that original sin destroyed free will in humankind. Sin did not stem necessarily from succumbing to the temptations of the flesh but rather from a perverse use of free will. This misuse of free will

\[2\] Ibid., 208.
limited man's potential use of it, leading to a loss of freedom of action. Thus, the Augustinian man found himself completely at the mercy of a God who may or may not bestow grace on an always undeserving sinner. West held that Augustine could not accept that God in any way could be responsible for this situation, so he set about to shift the responsibility to man by means of the fall of Adam. God could not, in Augustine's mind, be the author of evil. Man, by necessity, must have created his own dilemma.

West says of Augustine in this vein:

Regarding the consequences of his actions he was as indifferent as almost any man who has been self-conscious enough to record his own emotions, but he had an excessive share of that feeling of guilt which exists quite unrelated to any individual experience in the mind of almost every human being.**

Thus, Augustine created a system which explained the visible and the invisible world in terms of God's omnipotent perfection and man's total depravity. Because depravity stemmed from the misuse of the will, the will has been virtually lost to man, and he now must depend upon the elective grace of God, who chooses some men by means of special grace while others are condemned to endure the results of their distorted wills. Given the harshness of Augustine's final conclusions, West is

**Ibid., 209.
remarkably forgiving for what she considers a "system that abounds in false assumptions and contradictions." Augustine's errors," she stated, "were the result of his position in time, and so are not disgraceful." This attitude is an indication of West's own shift in position. As a young women in 1912, she wrote in a review that she found it "impossible to argue with a person who holds the doctrine of original sin." By the 1930s almost everything West wrote indicated that she held firmly to the doctrine herself. It is no criticism to point out that West was converted to this view by the light of her own experience. Within Saint Augustine West declared that no one, upon careful examination, can claim to have free will. This is an extraordinary claim until one perceives that she is drawing once again upon the psychology of her own day. Each individual possesses his own innate qualities which bear on his possibilities. As well, there is the factor of environment that "binds us in some way or another to the neuroses which compel us to choose death rather than life." West summarizes

\[\text{Ibid., 210.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{West, The Young Rebecca, 39.}\]
\[\text{West, St. Augustine, 215.}\]
her own view when she says that, "Augustine’s view that we are full of original sin, that we do not enjoy the free use of our wills, and must link ourselves to the eternal if we are to be saved, is at least a symbolic interpretation of something that the most secular-minded must allow to be true."33 This is the basis from which West considers Augustine the archetype of modern man.

West examines briefly Augustine’s *The City of God* and finds more that makes him somehow contemporary. Much of this work is comprised of criticism and attacks leveled at Greek and Roman civilization. But tangled up within this rejection of much of the world’s treasures is a "magnificent" attack on imperialism.34 Augustine’s feelings about Roman imperialism are not unusual coming from one who found himself a subject of the empire. Beyond his understandable dislike of Rome, he is able to pin-point why nations conquer and why empires will of necessity fail. This is, of course, a highly pertinent topic to one born in England in 1892. The psychological advantage, Augustine points out, goes to small states and not great empires. The conquering spirit leads to arrogance and moral irresponsibility and places the conquered people in a united position with moral author-

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lty on their side. Also, according to Augustine, conquering nations, being without justice, must also be without God. And the godless state cannot in the long run succeed. West seems to enjoy these dogmatic outbursts of Augustine. Whether she completely agreed with his logic, she shared his conclusion regarding the fate of empires. Perhaps she found it ironic that an individual should state essentially the same arguments fifteen hundred years before that she had stated so adamantly in the 1910s and 1920s.

Another important idea conveyed within The City of God is Augustine's philosophy of history. Augustine's views are not surprising in light of his theology. History was a "mass movement of predestination." Good and evil were locked in a continual battle that would be won in the long run by God, who in the meantime was selecting out those whom He choose to enjoy his grace. Evil would triumph on the earth: empires would be built and would crumble and wars and famine would continue. God could choose to intervene and bring peace, and sometimes would do so, but the fall of Adam had predestined man to live with sin with its accompanying follies.

Since West would go on to write more history her views on the topic, at this relatively early date, are

---Ibid.
Interesting. West combined two views in her work on Augustine. She believed, first, that great men do play an important role in history and can change the course of events. She certainly saw Augustine as a product of his time in full possession of the accompanying limitations. But, she believed, that the force of his genius had a significant impact not only in Hippo, in Africa, and in the Roman Empire, but that it transcended time and space, imbuing into all of us a little Augustinianism. This is so because his domain was that of ideas, which have a power greater than that of any army. West summed up her thoughts on his influence as follows:

It was not only that all the important subsequent manifestations of the religious spirit were to show signs of his influence, that his insistence on the unity of the Church was to confirm Catholicism as his doctrine of predestination was to beget Calvinism. It was also that humanity, and in particular the artist, was to think and feel as much as he thought and felt; that a great many people have recognized a peculiar fitness in the designation 'first modern man' which was bestowed on him by two German writers.\(^3\)

Not only did he serve as a conduit of ideas, but as a transformer of ideas as well. It will be a consistent theme of West's that men are generally impractical. They act from motives that often have no foundation in reality or reason. The power of an individual's ideas often determines their death. West would focus on this later.

\(^3\)Ibid., 233.
particularly when it affected nations enmeshed in a collective series of ideas.

Three years before West wrote her biography of St. Augustine she posed a question that seemingly lay behind the purpose of her biographical, investigative and fictional work. In a brief article about the curious life of Eve Lavalliere she asked:

Am I, in fact, so ignorant of my own nature that I should scrutinize every action of mine with the greatest caution lest I am obeying something primitive in me that makes me treacherous to every higher demand of reality? And am I, nevertheless, so precious that it is worth while going on living?

Her work on Augustine began to answer this question by providing her with a framework upon which to understand that that "something primitive" was, in fact, operative in the affairs of men. Her later works, particularly Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, return to this theme in greater depth.

Saint Augustine represents Rebecca West's first formal work of historical writing. She had done biography before and would do it many times again, primarily in article form, but after this work she became a historical writer of some note. She would not be flawless, but she would research diligently and write

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eloquently on many matters of great importance to the twentieth century.
CHAPTER VI

"THE MYSTERY OF PROCESS"
UNITY OF EXPERIENCE

What made West a philosophical historian as much as a novelist were her persistent inquiries into the nature of men and mankind using the lessons of the past as a source. Often requests from publishers for articles dealing with some current event produced thoughtful essays rooted in what West perceived as the historical sources of the subject. In 1936 she wrote, "It is one of the few advantages of living in our troubled age that we are surrounded by problems which, if they are considered at all carefully, lead us back to the fundamentals of human existence." West was convinced that mankind was motivated by a fundamental human nature working in concert with a given set of ideas. These ideas, which differed significantly from nation to nation, were far more influential in the life of the individual than reason or logic proceeding from direct circumstances. These often unconscious presuppositions dictated the


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life of the nation as directly as it did the life of the individual. In an article apparently aimed at young people, West recommended that, through reading, a person could come into contact not only with the best minds of his own generation, but would be led back to the "best abstract thought of the past." In so doing, "he will learn the important truth that our material conditions depend on abstract thought." She went on to explain by example.

It is no use trying to limit oneself to be a practical man. Theory dogs one throughout one's day. Whether there is butter or margarine on the breakfast table depends on whether the community knows what Adam Smith was talking about; whether the policeman out on the street is the kind of man of whom one can ask the time or the kind of man that knocks one out with a rubber truncheon depends on what the community considered regarding the matter of Mill's Essay on Liberty; whether night falls with or without an air raid depends on the degree to which the community is content with St. Thomas Aquinas's definition of a just war and its legitimacy.

To be sure, the condition of a nation had much to do with the public mind it possessed. West had considered the issues of national traits, nationalism, and the public mind many times, but only in limited ways. The 1930s provided a rich field for examining how nations conduct themselves. West saw, in the period between the

\(^2\)Ibid., 25.

\(^3\)Ibid., 25-26.
wars, an increasing preoccupation with a destructive form of nationalism. Those nations which succumbed to this phenomenon did so, she believed, as a result of a given ideology which predisposed them to such behavior. As Europe began to give way under the awful weight of national hatred, West wrote in an attempt to understand what was happening and, more importantly, to understand why.

In 1935 she published "The Necessity and Grandeur of the International Ideal" in *Challenge to Death*. West argued that nationalism was as beneficial and necessary to the good health of a nation as exercise was to the health of the individual. "The public mind is under no illusion when it regards its nationalist spirit as a part of itself which it could not sacrifice without grave loss." While liberals in England before World War II assailed nationalism from every direction, West perceived that its essence stemmed from an emotion and reasoning which was essentially positive. A nation offered to its people a tradition which stemmed from their experience. These individuals had contended with the same conditions and the same environment and had created successful means, by which not only to survive, but also

to live. West claimed that if a person was the sort who loved life, "he will love best of all this part of it he knows most thoroughly." To be sure, one received the opportunity to know no other country like one's own. The emotion felt towards one's country may, most reasonably, be called love. It is akin to the feeling an individual holds towards his own family.

"Where the public mind goes wrong," West continued, "is when it builds on this recognition of the usefulness of nationalism a repudiation of internationalism." West believed that, historically, Europe found itself in times of most stable peace when nationalism and internationalism were used as counterbalances to maintain a nation's equilibrium. Augustine, she argued, recognized early that, though he despised Roman imperialism, the maintenance of peace in Africa and Europe was best effected through a cooperative, international effort. Rome had, at least, presided over a somewhat peaceful Africa. Augustine ruled out the system of empire as an effective tool of internationalism for it stifled a country's healthy nationalism. Imperialism did violence to other nations' customs, culture, and traditions, thereby creating envy and hatred. Furthermore, common sense told

*Ibid., 240.*

*Ibid., 242.*
Augustine that peace could not evolve from the violence done to a colonial nation by an imperial power. According to West, he therefore recommended a society of small states. Nationalism could be maintained and checked by the society whose peace and prosperity depended on it.

West suggested that Augustine's formula was so logical that it should not be forgotten by "normal human beings." Thus, the men of the Middle Ages came to understand what Augustine had understood. They would have been startled, West commented, "if any voice from the jingoistic future had warned them to beware against losing their manliness by listening to these enfeebling counsels of internationalism, because they thought of themselves as internationalists." Indeed, Charlemagne, who studied assiduously the works of Augustine in this regard, founded the Holy Roman Empire, which sought to be a commonwealth of Christian people everywhere. West believed, that while Charlemagne was fierce in battle, he repeatedly "modified the conduct and political direction of his wars," so that harmony among nations might be achieved rather than the mere conquest of land. Charlemagne, as well as Augustine, believed that earthly peace was the foundation of heavenly peace.

and worked in that direction. Europeans of her day, West continued, should not dismiss out of hand what was found profitable by those great men.

Internationalism faded as the Church became dis-united, and Europe again found itself consumed with war. The Church had been the glue of the Holy Roman Empire. Now, if man was to live in peace he needed to find a set of principles upon which he could unite. Thus, began the search to settle questions about the role of the state as a guarantor of the rights of its citizens. If individuals possessed a set of rights, then would it not be the government's responsibility to act in such a way that guaranteed the security and rights of its people? This search, West contended, was a necessary preliminary to a new attempt at internationalism, "but it was natural enough that men should forget that it had this end." Since nationalism was more an instinctive part of the individual than internationalism, it followed that as a phenomenon nationalism had never been erased from human history. That did not mean that it was more beneficial than internationalism, which was not instinctual, but learned. West claimed there are truths that are learned without the exercise of the mind, through perception alone. Nationalism falls into this category. Then there

*Ibid., 248.*
are truths which we learn only through "the exercise of protracted and elaborate thought and deliberate perception." Still others, come only from a deduction of the two. Internationalism was a learned and profitable means of societal survival. Its classification as a truth derived from "deliberate thought" did not in the least make it less valuable. West reflected that some of the most useful concepts that have insured man’s survival are truths that have stemmed from this third category, including the idea of government.

The results of nationalism without the counterbalance of internationalism bore its horrible fruit in World War I. In the age of press and cinema, the horror of the failure of internationalism, left Europe with a widespread knowledge of its tragedy. By 1914, as well, the rights of man were well enough understood that almost everyone knew "that when a ploughman’s guts are poked out with a bayonet and trodden into the mud, the same wrong has been done to him and to the universe that would have been done were he a prince." West believed that the war had done severe damage to the psyche of Europe, just as if it were a person who had experienced a traumatic shock: "capricious, distracted, given to

*Ibid., 248.

*Ibid., 250.
violence towards self and others, careless of their environment, and incapable of carrying on a normal constructive life."

No recovery from this malady was possible if Europe continued to listen to those "propagandists" who suggested that all things done in the name of one's nation were acceptable. West was particularly hard on those who maligned the Treaty of Versailles on the grounds that a certain portion of the population was not of age when the Treaty became law, and therefore, were not bound to an unjust peace their fathers had made.

While West had never been a proponent of the Treaty, herself, she recognized that for civilization to continue, government must possess the right of continuity. Business, law, and government, among other things, would be thrown into utter chaos if contracts could be set aside because parties to whom they would apply were not of age when the agreement was made.

The Treaty of Versailles had its problems, but one of them, according to West, should not be that it was now null and void. In 1925 West summed the matter up in *The New Republic*. The fundamental problem with the Treaty was that it did not pay the slightest attention to putting people on good terms who must now live together. She cited an experience she had on a visit to Hungary

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11 Ibid.
where she rode on the train from Vienna to Budapest with two Hungarians who had for some time made their home in America. They had become wealthy enough to return with their families to the country of their birth. One was a Slovak and the other a Magyar, and their only means of communication with each other was through their broken American-English. They liked each other very much and came to agreement on most issues of the day, mainly because, though their American homes were fifteen hundred miles apart, they both enjoyed reading the same editorials from a columnist writing in one of the Hearst newspapers. In the dining car they even "stood each other Slivowitz," a traditional Hungarian toast. Such occurrences, West reflected, could only be the product of the United States, where "disparate human stuff" was being molded into a unity.

Europe did not seem to have paid the slightest attention to the problem of putting these gentlemen on amicable terms, which is the problem of peace in little. Even the Peace Treaty, which might reasonably have been supposed to consider the matter, would have done no more for them (had they stayed in their birthplaces) than compensate them for the wrong of being linked with the hated Austrians by transferring the Slovak to Czecho-Slovakia, though he and his people like the Czechs not much better than the Austrians, and the Transylvania Magyar to Rumania, which is an enemy country. The nods and smiles, the Slivowitzes,

would not have happened if only Europe had had its way with them.\textsuperscript{13}

Such was the problem of the Treaty. Nonetheless, it was still, in 1935, a legal instrument which should be the basis of analyzing the problems of post-war Europe in hopes of creating a new social order. Instead, fascists pretended that they were in possession of all the principles which would solve the problems Europe faced after World War I. In so pretending, Europeans disregard reality by succumbing to the myth that they would be given "every provision and protection by an all-powerful father" if only they were obedient children. By thus attempting to organize the State "along nursery lines," followers of Fascism received an emotional release because they abandoned their responsibility to the State. West equated this feeling toward the State with young love, where the smallest incident seems tremendous. In a democratic nation, for example, a punctual train does very little to arouse joy.

West warned that fascism was an attempt to govern, during a transitory period of history, using rigid forms based on concepts from a vanishing epoch. She suggested that, perhaps more than ever before the state should remain elastic, so that its citizens were free to adapt.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
to changing conditions. It is interesting to note West's non-definitive statements in this article regarding the best form of government for this new era of European history. She seemed truly to regard the mid-1930s as a potential watershed in the history of Europe where, if it were not saddled with the lunacy of fascism, a new scheme for living and governing might actually emerge. While not resigned to the long term dominance of fascism, West did know better than most English people that Germany was in the destructive grasp of the Nazi party. Her husband's business contacts in that country had convinced her of that from the moment Hitler came to power.

"The Necessity and Grandeur of the International Ideal" presented a plea to thinking people in Europe to disregard nationalism as the dominant political principle. While West had extolled the virtues of nationalism as a social, cultural, and historical phenomena, she was careful to point out that in a political context nationalism was ultimately destructive. It had, she believed, been proved reprehensible and ineffective by the whole of human history. West did not mention either Germany or Italy by name in the article but the references are nonetheless clear. Were it not, she continued, that so many Europeans had become
"unbalanced" as a result of World War I, the extreme forms of political nationalism in evidence might abate. The body of stable opinion might prevail and the experience of the post-war years become the material from which wisdom was gained. However, many European minds were profoundly disturbed by the war, leaving the unchecked nationalist spirit to flourish unfettered in many parts of the continent. West, by virtue of her argument, predicted the inevitability of a second European war.

She recognized that governments which achieve power by appealing to an unhealthy type of nationalism very rarely hold views that conformed to what she referred to as the Catholic view of war. This was the view based on medieval ideas which were also the foundation of Protestant thought. Europe might manage to escape the war, which would inevitably arise from the type of nationalism in question, if the historically founded view on war prevailed. West held out little hope of that possibility, however. The Catholic view stated that men and nations did have the legitimate right to fight, providing certain conditions were fulfilled. She mentioned almost in passing that the state should, for legitimacy, declare war in the proper way. The state may fight a defensive war if its rights are menaced by

*Ibid., 252-253.*
foreign aggressors or when an actual violation has already occurred. West believed that historically a case could be made for an offensive war despite doubts about it in international law. Punishing a power that "has done evil and threatens to repeat it may be the only way of achieving security." The war waged, though, must be moderate and in proportion to the wrong committed. A state that was neglecting its responsibilities to its people did not necessarily open it to interference by another nation. The citizens may, however, take up force against their own government and request outside aid. The loyalty due or not due a given government is a subject West investigated in depth after World War II when she began writing on the topic of treason. West added an important exclusion to what she perceived to the historic rule of non-intervention in another nation's affairs. "When the people's wrongs are grave to the point of wholesale persecution of the innocent with death and slavery, there can be no doubt as to the justice of a war waged for their deliverance." 

While this code of war was, according to West, overwhelmingly just and sensible it nevertheless con-

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*Ibid., 254.
continued to be compromised. Peace was jeopardized primarily because nations, like individuals, failed to examine their motives. West displayed her amazement at mankind's power of self-deception. Self-serving interests often masquerade as just causes, because war genuinely benefited some members of society. West noted that the economic system of Europe did little more than play into the hands of the nationalists who favored war in order that they might bring glory to their own people. That happened because so many persons in an industrialized state lived in the meanest conditions. They were part of a large dispossessed class who might possibly look upon war as a means to a more interesting life. West once heard a speaker admit that he was glad the war had come along to take him away from the monotony of his job. These people are the "debtors of civilization," she said, who will, and deserve, to destroy civilization if some solution could not be found that made it more beneficial to them. Nationalism, of the unhealthy type, served only to fuel the fires of discontent of this class by laying the blame for national and economic difficulties outside the realm of legitimate possibilities.

Because a state often failed to answer correctly the question of justness when it feels war necessary, and because citizens very often could not see or know the
reality of a situation to which they committed themselves, possibly unto death, there was a need, West argued, for an international body that could provide "a technique for the mutual cancellation of greeds, . . . and the slowing down of aggressions headlong pace by submitting it to a delaying process." The fact that this article, published in 1935, made no mention whatever of the League of Nations indicated the complete ineffectiveness of this international body in West's opinion. Her objection to the League of Nations came from its inability to enforce the Treaty of Versailles, which was the least of its responsibilities. In a typically dramatic letter to her sister, Winnie, West wrote, "the insane mercy and charity of the Treaty of Versailles makes me gnash my teeth. I hope you realize . . . the Huns will go down into Austria, and civilization will be over." The League's failure to enforce even this "charitable treaty" nearly gave it the status, in West's mind, of a collaborator with evil. She had, therefore, no illusions concerning the difficulty of creating an effective international body.

Ibid., 257.

Rebecca West to Winnified Fairfield, (no date), quoted in Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 151.
West well understood that an individual's first love was his own country, which was a form of self preservation, akin to an individual who must love himself above others if he is to survive. An artist, she explained, must believe that he alone has "command of a certain aspect of reality," and that he alone must undertake to express what he understands. This belief propelled the artist to pursue a difficult task. While he had faith and confidence in the work he did, it would be a most frightening revelation if the artist were told that he alone possessed the truth and that he alone was supreme in his craft. "He would be appalled by the news that the human mind was never to behave any better." The sane artist would prefer to be a contribute to a larger body of knowledge that sought to chart the course for mankind by analyzing experience.

So it was with nations. Nations must feel that they alone possess some uniqueness which allows them to contribute to the world community. Each race should feel fortunate and proud of its contributions to the whole of human history. However, each country should feel it would be a nightmare if it became the only country and all others were abolished. "There is no country better

than Britain," West wrote. "yet there could be no more hideous prospect imaginable than that there should be no other country than England."\textsuperscript{20} For just as each artist and every individual contributes to the sum of knowledge mankind seeks in order to live well in this universe, so nations each play a critical role in trying to work out perplexities of the meaning of life.

Contemplating of West's ideas, however logical they may be, leave one with the uncomfortable feeling that she was being naive. When she was young she expressed idealistic hopes about the possibilities of socialism. Beyond that period of time, however, West's political views held fast to a realism that bordered sometimes on the cynical. Certainly a very large part of her was already in the mid-1930s convinced of the inevitability of a war with Germany. While this article seemed to be the expression of an ideal, which explains the title, it would not be making too large an assumption to say that she wrote with other motives as well. It should be remembered that in England in 1934 eleven and one-half million Britons voted in the Peace Ballot expressing their support for such issues as "peace through the League." The overwhelming majority even approved of collective military measures to restrain aggressors.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 259.
This sentiment was not lost on West. Perhaps the most important contribution of this article came in regard to the debate within the Labour party who in 1934-1935 had split into two factions. The pacifist wing, lead by George Lansbury, whom West admired years before for his stand on socialism and the suffrage issue, opposed individual nations or the League imposing sanctions against aggressor nations because it might lead to war. Her article, while supporting the "international ideal," laid down specific justifications for war if necessary. West, who continued to vote Labour at least through 1945, could not tolerate or support a pacifist position.

The Peace Ballot had also indicated that the majority of English people were in favor of an "all-around reduction in armaments." West perceived that such action by Britain would not produce peace but eventual defeat. Thus, her article may be viewed as a thoughtful call to arms, if necessary, as much as a vote of support for internationalism.

"The Necessity and Grandeur of the International Ideal" represents in one realm what West was doing in the many areas she investigated in the period before the Second World War. Because she worked within a framework

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of Kantian principles, there is evidence of a systematic unity in all her thought. West accepted Kant's idea that human beings know in two ways. First, there are analytic judgments which are *a priori* in the sense that we know their truth or falsity prior to experience. Synthetic judgments are *a posteriori* in that their truth or falsity are known only after experience. In this sort of judgment lies the possibility of learning something new. What we know, both with and without experience, comes from human nature and physical nature. This blend of realities produce phenomena, the sum total of which is connected throughout. West accepted the connectedness of reality and phenomena and brought it to bear in all her work. Her entire philosophy of art was based on the artist's ability to discover something about reality that made a contribution to the cumulative body of knowledge that already existed. Each individual, each culture, and each nation played a similar role.

West necessarily viewed the world in causal terms. Because of this view her own life and work was an attempt to understand the forces at work in the universe. The cause and effect she observed operative in the universe amounted to the propulsion of historic forces in the world. Thus, she approached each subject she tackled as a process. Truth lay in the process, just as experience
was the means to understanding the process. The connectedness of experience was due to the existence of a transcendental unity. This belief explains why in so much of what West wrote there seemed to be a striving to unearth the final answer or to find a transcendent truth. Although she knew complete understanding would not be the ultimate result of her work, she continued to add to the existing body of human understanding in hopes of someday reading "the riddle of our universe."^{22}

Prior to writing *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, which was her monumental attempt to merge the processes of all areas of reality into a single picture, West began examining more limited spheres. Nationalism and inter-nationalism were subjects of such vital interest in the mid-1930s that anyone attempting to understand the historical process and the unity of phenomena could not escape its examination. Interestingly, Kant, whose philosophy was so pertinent to West's worldview, is credited with a social philosophy from which was conceived the modern idea of a "permanent congress of nations." He argued that if each individual was a participant in a process developing a universal legislation, then human political organizations must reflect this fact. Therefore, a form beyond the nation was

^{22}West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 1013.
required. West's arguments though more historically rooted, were nonetheless based on this basic supposition.

West's look at the historical processes of art, history, and religion during the 1920s and 1930s was the result of her processional thinking. In 1931 she wrote an article called "Men and Religion" in which she satirically suggested that religion had been destroyed by the masculine mentality. Through a brief history of asceticism, West surveyed the process through which Christianity had traveled and concluded that the cruelty evident in the Church, which could hardly be further from the gospel message, was the result of masculine behavior and thinking. The article envisioned a world of the future where women have taken control and reinstated the Christian ideal, completely rejecting the idea of suffering as a way to God. Self-flagellation and self-abasement were in direct conflict with the life-giving message of Christ. This article, however, had less to do with the difference between men and women than it had to do with the unfortunate human condition which insisted on dragging down the very possibility which had the power to elevate man. In the same year West completed *Saint Augustine* she wrote *A Letter to a*

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**23**Rebecca West, "Men and Religion," December 1931, TMs [photocopy], Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
Grandfather (1933), previously mentioned. Again she examined, in a fictional way, that awful tendency in human beings to reject the good in favor of the harmful. It remained of interest to her, long beyond her study of St. Augustine, why human beings act as though they were not in possession of their own will. Too often, she found, people were unwilling to renounce the pleasures of a determined existence. This sluggishness accounted also, perhaps, for part of the appeal of fascism. In one of the most revealing personal accounts of her religious beliefs West contributed to I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Certain Eminent Men and Women of Our Time. Here she confessed her own,

... faith in a process, in a particular process that is part of the general process of life, though sometimes annulled by it. I find an ultimate value in the efforts of human beings to do more than merely exist, to choose and analyze their experiences and by the findings of that analysis help themselves to further experiences which are of a more pleasurable kind."


West believed that society was too sick in 1939 to use pleasure as a test of value. Her definition of pleasure came from the same Latin word used by the Renaissance Humanists, who used *voluptas* to mean the pursuit of agreeable sensations and not abandonment to sensuality. Pleasure demanded that human beings learn as much as possible about reality, thereby increasing their chances of living harmoniously within their own environment. Since harmonious living is agreeable and only possible through curbing one's pleasures, so that they do not interfere with the rights of others, West saw no reason why gratification as an ideal was not comparable with a program of self-restraint.

The problem involved in not living for pleasure, West continued, was obvious.

We will soon find ourselves living for pain. If we do not regard as sacred our own joys and the joys of others, we will open the door and let into life the ugliest attribute of the human race, which is cruelty. I believe this vice to be as much of a shame and a doom to humanity as the original sin of the theologians...  

West saw that throughout human history cruelty had been the standard bearer. Because Christianity was perverted into a translation that valued pain over pleasure, then the logical question became, "If it is a good and holy thing to be punished, must it not also be a...

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*Ibid.,* 327.
good and holy thing to punish?" The answer to this question, West believed, had determined the course of all history. It had also formed mankind's institutions and shaped the patterns of his lives. Logically and in the spirit of the Gospel, pain should have warned mankind that something was being done to the organism which was "inimical to its well-being."

What is surely West's most specific and personal religious statement is best left in her own words:

This deception is crystallized in its most pictorial, in its most horribly important form, by the history of Christianity. The spectacle of the rise of Fascism, and some contact with the Eastern Church, which is many centuries nearer primitive Christianity than the Western Church, have made it clear to me that the life of Christ should have been an incomparable blessing to man and a revelation of the way he must follow if he is not to be a beast, and a failure at that. Christ was the Incarnate denunciation of cruelty. He was sinless, he was full of love, he was ingenious in devising prescriptions of mercy; he was what the world needed, he could have taught us how to make life a perpetual pleasure. Society could find nothing better to do with him than kill him. Here is a man who could have saved his life if he had dissimulated his virtue. He unveiled it, knowing that he had made himself a target for man's arrows. Just as a great artist finds the perfect myth to symbolize the truth he has discovered, that shall sum it up in a form that is acceptable by the human faculty of attention, so his crucifixion demonstrated exactly what the assault of cruelty on the innocent means; and the subsequent services devised by the early Church commemorated the beauty of the virtue that was

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*ibid., 328.*

*ibid.*
slain and the beastliness shown by the slayer, and reiterated the warning that this was the kind of crime man was inherently likely to commit unless he watched himself. There could be no more proper medicine for the human disease.\textsuperscript{27}

From that point on, West said, the Church nullified, as much as possible, the message of Christ by developing a doctrine of the crucifixion as an atonement for the sins of man instead of a demonstration of them. St. Paul and the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, glorified the idea of sacrifice, placing it among the highest good. Thus, pain became associated with godliness and pleasure became the work of the devil. So human history had evolved and so it would end, West suggested, unless man learned to grab those things which were life-giving.

West demonstrated the ultimate consequence of this destructive philosophy in a work of fiction published during the war in 1944. Armin L. Robinson edited a collection entitled \textit{The Ten Commandments: Ten Short Novels of Hitler's War Against the Moral Code}, in which West contributed "Thou Shalt Not Make Any Graven Image." The story was about the death of three Danes who died under the Nazi occupation of their country because they could not passively accept the introduction of evil into their external and internal lives. They each, in individual ways, believed that the ultimate values of

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 334-35.
love, truth, and justice must remain in evidence in their lives. To collaborate even passively with the Nazis would be a denunciation of those values. Collaboration would also be a nullification of "the process," which was the duty of mankind to understand the universe. Says Nils, one of the characters, "We must each follow our own path to reality. And that is what Nazism will not let us do. . . . They wish to keep the world a dead planet. We who rebel against the Nazis are keeping it bright." Though they lost their lives, West had each of the three characters, sustained until the horrible end by a joy transcendent. She portrayed this joy as a feeling derived from a universal understanding, which was much the same type of emotion she attributed to the creation and appreciation of good art.

West's examination of the processes of art, history, politics, and religion would lead her naturally to an investigation that brought these elements together. Her emphasis on unity almost made this inevitable. The subject that provided her the setting for such an investigation was somewhat of a surprise even for her. Nevertheless, in hindsight, it appears that almost

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everything she wrote prior to 1940 contributed in some way to the astounding scope of her *magnum opus*, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*. 
CHAPTER VII

BLACK LAMB AND GREY FALCON I

That West chose Yugoslavia as the setting to bring together her thinking is less likely than that Yugoslavia chose her. Her trips to Yugoslavia came from a desire to keep a finger on the pulse of Europe during a critical period. Though she had been actively involved in anti-Nazi causes, she was not passionately anti-communist until 1939 when the Soviet Union signed the non-aggression pact with Hitler. West’s biographer, Victoria Glendinning, points out specifically that “Whatever her earlier reservations about the Soviet experiment, Rebecca had not up to this time been anti-Communist.”

In fact, she held a moderately left position on many issues. She had written in favor of the Republican government during the Spanish Civil War in the Left Review. She signed a letter protesting the expulsion of an American communist from the London School of

1Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 152.

2Rebecca West, “Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War” Left Review (December 1937): 27.
Economics, and was also a British delegate at the "left-wing" International Association of Writers for the Defense of Culture, and a sponsor of Writers Against Fascism and War. If West's anti-communism seemed to evolve, her anti-Fascism was spontaneous and immediate. Her opposition to the appeasement of Germany or any aggressive country was well documented. Of the Peace Pledge Union she wrote in Nash's magazine in 1936, "Do you believe you are going to abolish cancer if you get 100,000 people to sign a pledge that they do not intend to have cancer?"

West's acceptance, in the spring of 1936, of the British Council's offer to tour the Balkans--Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia--no doubt seemed to her an opportunity to look closely into the affairs of Europe. The Balkans had played a critical role in the recent history of Europe, and there was no reason to expect it would not continue to do so.

West traveled to Yugoslavia three times in all, though Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through

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3Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 152.


5All those who traveled under the auspices of the British Council were expected to write a report about their observations. These reports were passed to the Foreign Office.
Yugoslavia is written from the perspective of one extensive trip she took with her husband, Henry Andrews, in 1937. Although West knew that the Balkans had played an important role in the history of Europe, she had no reason to suppose, on her first visit in 1936, that she would become completely absorbed with the people, culture, traditions, and history of the South Slavs. For months she believed the project "a complete folly," writing to a friend that despite that fact, she could not seem to shake loose from the obsession of working on this project. Her publishers, Viking Press, expressed some reluctance, as well, promising royalties of 15% only if the book sold more than 4,000 copies and 25% if sales exceeded 6,000. Her advance was only £200. Despite her publisher's lack of enthusiasm West pursued this project as though she were on a mission. In fact, there is throughout the book a driving energy which leaves the reader with the sense that there is a profound discovery to be made. Whether West consciously wrote this anticipation into the book or not, her own search for the universal mysteries that she was convinced existed in microcosm in the Balkans, propels the reader to think beyond the superficial. In The Strange Necessity West quoted Santayana that "It might be said of every work of

*Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 154.*
art or of every natural object, that it could be made the
starting-point for a chain of inferences that should
reveal the whole universe..." The unity of Rebecca
West's mind permitted her to infer the universe starting
with that piece of geography that became Yugoslavia after
the Great War.

West began the book by apologizing to her husband,
while on the train to Yugoslavia, for insisting he take
his vacation to that country during Easter. West does
not turn away from the opportunity to utilize the
symbolism of the train. As they very often, though not
exclusively, traveled about by train, it becomes literary
and figuratively the means by which progress and process
takes place. Yugoslavia, after all, was created as the
result of the Armistice signed in 1918 in a railway
car on a siding in the Compiegne forest. And though she
could not know it then, Yugoslavia's fate would also be
sealed when twenty-two years later Hitler would force the
French to humiliate themselves in a railway car. Later
West would write an entire novel, The Birds Fall Down,
that centered around an historic conversation that took
place on a moving railroad car. Thus the historical
importance of the train makes it an appropriate setting
to begin her work.

"West, The Strange Necessity, 191."
The obsession West expressed in her apology to Henry for the inconvenience of the trip is explained by recalling a personally significant incident that took place in 1934. She was recovering from surgery when she heard news that King Alexander of Yugoslavia had been assassinated in the streets of Marseille. In her semi-lucid state, following the surgery, she imagined that the inevitable result of this action would be war. In her panic she asked the nurse to bring her a phone so that she might call her husband. "The King of Yugoslavia has been assassinated," West cried. "Oh, dear!" said the nurse, "Did you know him?" "No," I said. "Then why," she asked, "do you think it's so terrible?" Her question made me remember that the word 'idiot' comes from a Greek root meaning private person.® West took this exchange as an opportunity to describe early on what would be one of many central themes in this book — the difficulty the sexes have in understanding one another. If idiocy is the female defect, then "lunacy" is its male counterpart. Lunacy permits men to see the broad outlines of objects, but because

they are so obsessed with "public affairs," they fail to see the details, especially of their own natures. The nurse represented idiocy incarnate. West explained to her, "Well, you know, assassinations lead to other things!" "Do they?" the nurse asked. The slaughter of royalty, West reflected, had set off many of the most catastrophic events in her own life and in the lives of those that went before her. Hapsburg history alone was strewn with the bodies of dead royalty. Most of their deaths, moreover, affected history more than their lives.

West spent the "Prologue" discussing the murders of Empress Elizabeth of Austria, who convinced her husband Franz Josef to create the Dual Monarchy and helped influence Hungary's decision to accept it, Alexander Obrenovitch, King of Serbia, and his wife Draga, and of course, Franz Ferdinand, the Archduke of Austria. West's point once again, which she had never made better, was that man displayed a perverse propensity to elevate his love of death over his love of life. Elizabeth, married Franz Josef against the wishes of his mother, the Archduchess Sophie, who was according to West, a woman of universal significance. Sophie was the kind of woman men respect because she was "lethal." She possessed none of the "womanly qualities" which could have served to temper

*Ibid., 3.*
her cruelty. She was indirectly responsible for the death of both of Elizabeth’s children and responsible for some very ugly persecutions. Elizabeth’s courageous travels through a hostile Hungary allowed her to see the problems of misgovernment and push her husband toward granting Hungary autonomy under a Dual Monarchy. West believed that this move alone permitted the Austro-Hungarian Empire to survive into the twentieth century. The good Elizabeth was capable of, however, was stymied by Franz Josef’s decision to place his mother over his wife. "His love of life made him love Elizabeth. His love of death made him love his abominable mother, and give her authority over Elizabeth which she horribly misused."

Elizabeth’s murderer, Luccheni, the Italian born in Paris, was, according to West, playing out an historic drama when he thrust a stiletto through her corsette and into her heart. He was a member of the dispossessed class created by the Industrial Revolution and, like her, was truly powerless to control his own destiny. He had no words to express his plight, which became audible only through the death screams of Elizabeth. Part of the crime society committed against this class was that they made them incapable of forming "thoughts or design[ing]"

10Ibid., 5.
actions other than the crudest and most violent."¹¹ West's technique of using historic analogy here makes good reading. She equates the plight of Luccheni's class to the Donatists whose ravings, centuries before, that the sacraments must be administered by a righteous priest tore the Church apart. "But though they raved they were not mad. They were making the only noise they knew to express the misery inflicted on them by the economic collapse of the Western Roman Empire."¹² They sensibly recognized their death was connected to the fate of the Empire. Luccheni, who had no particular grudge against Elizabeth, sought to kill any member of royalty. His expression of discontent did nothing, however, to relieve the burden of monarchy. For this he stayed in prison for many years, "almost until his like found a vocabulary and a name for themselves and had astonished the world with the farce of Fascism."¹³

One of West's strengths as a writer and historian is her ability to weave together disparate pieces of information. While discussing the death of Elizabeth and the causes, she is able to poignantly mention the larger issue of the historical ill-treatment of women. "So

¹¹Ibid., 9.
¹²Ibid.
¹³Ibid.
Elizabeth died with a terrible ease. All her life her corsets had deformed and impeded her beautiful body, but they did not protect her from the assassin’s stiletto."14 So with no further comment West makes the reader painfully aware of the problems to which the passage immediately refers, as well as those that remain relevant yet unmentioned.

The murder of King Alexander and Queen Draga was so gruesome that West, in 1903, as a ten year old girl, remembered the tabloid that announced their bloody deaths in Belgrade. Her statement about their deaths set forth a thesis of sorts, if such a massive and sprawling book can be kept to a unified theme.

But I now realize that when Alexander and Draga fell from that balcony the whole of the modern world fell with them. It took some time to reach the ground and break its neck, but its fall started then. For this is not strictly a moral universe, and it is not true that it is useless to kill a tyrant because a worse man takes his place.15

Peter Karageorgevitch who succeeded Alexander was, according to West, a statesman and a fine military man. He was, in fact responsible for the strength and unity Serbia was able to establish at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Austrian mind Serbia's

14Ibid., 9-10.
15Ibid., 11.
strength posed a threat. Austria, which was unable to manage the territory it already held, wanted more. Serbia's successes created resentment in other Slav groups and hatred in the German-Austrians. Because Elizabeth's son, Rudolf, did not live to take the thrown, the heir to the crown became the "unlovable melancholic," the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Este. Franz Ferdinand had proposed the creation of a tripartite monarchy to no one's satisfaction. His "trialist" scheme was designed to disrupt the South Slav peoples, whom would be more discontent than ever because his plan would not admit to the South Slav idea. The Slavs, who were by no means monolithic, wanted nothing less than the independence possessed by the Serbs, though not necessarily unification with them. The Austrians of his court, on the other hand, took his proposal as an expression of contempt for the Emperor and his conservative policies.16

Thus West sets the scene for Franz Ferdinand's trip to Sarajevo on St. Vitus Day 1914. This solemn holiday marked the Turkish victory over the Serbs at Kossovo in 1398. This defeat had meant five hundred years of enslavement. "That defeat had been wiped out in the Balkan War [1911-12] by the recapture of Kossovo, and it

16 Between the demands of the Czechs, Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, historic Hungary would have been essentially dismembered.
was not tactful to remind the Serbs that some of their people were still enslaved by a foreign power."  

In addition, Austria went to great lengths to successfully block Serbia's Adriatic expansion during negotiations stemming from the Balkan War. Thus, tensions were extraordinarily high when Franz Ferdinand decided to visit the Bosnian capital to conduct army maneuvers on the Serbian frontier, with vastly insufficient police protection. Of this assassination, West declared, she remembered nothing. She was busy being an idiot then. "But my idiocy was like my anaesthetic. During the blankness it dispensed I was cut about and felt nothing, but it could not annul the consequences. The pain came afterwards."  

Therefore the assassination of Alexander in 1934 alerted West to the fact Europe was again in for another bout of violence. Modern weapons would assure that this violence would not be limited to soldiers on the front-line. All populations would feel directly the insanity which would soon grip Europe. West said:

I had to admit that I quite simply and flatly knew nothing at all about the south-eastern corner of Europe; and since there proceeds steadily from that place a stream of events which are a source of danger to me, which indeed for four years threat-

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"Ibid., 13.

"Ibid., 14.
ened my safety and during that time deprived me for ever of many benefits, that is to say I know nothing of my own destiny. That is a calamity. Pascal wrote: 'Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, suffices to kill him. But if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this.'

Thus, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon represents West's search into the "nature of the advantage which the universe has over us, which in my case seems to lie in the Balkan Peninsula."  

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon is a very difficult book to categorize, classify, or summarize. It defies assignment to a genre while it overwhelsms with its sense of importance. It is too personal to be considered history, strictly. It is too profound to be simply a travelogue. And it is too provocative and prophetic to be ignored. The book cannot be followed thematically or chronologically. The only recognizable structure comes from the itinerary of the trip itself, which provides the chapter titles. Since West actually made three trips to Yugoslavia the reader never knows for sure at what point she acquired her knowledge or experienced some

19Ibid., 21-22.
20Ibid.
event. Much of her historical information she researched and investigated first-hand while in Yugoslavia, but some of the material came from sources which are usually only vaguely referred to. What is completely evident is that West has tackled a portion of history that is extraordinarily complex and loaded with myths, and has, in the process, wrestled it into intellectual submission while disclosing its significance and relevance to all periods of history.

Although West began writing Black Lamb and Grey Falcon before World War II, the "Epilogue" of the book reflects the commencement of events foretold throughout the previous thousand pages. The Nazi blitz of Belgrade brings the book to a dramatic conclusion as great as any work of fiction. And though West could not know it when she began, Germany’s actions bring the book full circle. In the first chapter West recounts the journey to Yugoslavia by train through Austria and Germany. She and Henry’s traveling companions in the first-class compartment were Germans. Their bizarre behavior, by West’s standards, seem to characterize their nation’s instability and volatility. For example, they adamantly demand the expulsion of a young Italian man who was sitting in the first-class compartment with a second-class ticket, which is understandable until the
Andrews discovered sometime later that the Germans possessed only second-class tickets themselves. When the Yugoslav ticket-collector, who had been picked up upon crossing the border into Yugoslavia, discovered the ticket discrepancy he asked for the difference in fares. The Germans, however, despite the small monetary difference, attempted to bribe him rather than pay the additional fare. West watched in horror as the ticket collector, who was a very poor Croat, anguished over accepting the bribe, which to him was a significant amount of money, but accepting it would cost him his job if he were caught. He finally forced them to pay the difference which they did grudgingly and with great difficulty for the reason that none of them knew where their money was. West gives many more examples of ways in which the normal details of life proved almost insurmountable to them. They were convinced, as well, that all Slavs were "barbarians" and everything Slavic inferior. West asked them why then they were taking their holiday to Yugoslavia if they found it all so disagreeable. On the Dalmatian coast, they replied, there were many Germans vacationing, which would make it bearable.

Such behavior West and her husband found mystifying.

It was disconcerting to be rushing through the night with this carriageful of unhappy muddlers, who
were so nice and so incomprehensible, and so apparently doomed to disaster of a kind so special that it was impossible for anybody not of their blood to imagine how it could be averted.21

West's thinking about these Germans would become strangely prophetic by the end of the book. She mused that the Industrial Revolution had "grooved society with a number of deep slots" into which most human beings rolled smoothly. These people with whom she traveled were successful business people in Germany who fell into that category. But because capitalism was passing into a "decadent phase" that stripped away the promised results these people were left "broken and beaten, and their ability to choose the broad outlines of their daily lives, to make political decisions, was now less than it had been originally."22 In one telling sentence the reader of today hears the tragic ring of things to come. "Their helplessness was the greater because they had plainly a special talent for obedience."23 West concludes the "Journey" chapter with two remarks, which both in their separate ways (one positive and one negative), explain why she made the trip. "I tried to tell myself that these people in the carriage were not of

21 Ibid., 37.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
importance, and were not typical, but I knew that I lied. These were exactly like all Aryan Germans I had ever known; and there were sixty millions of them in the middle of Europe." At this point in the narrative the train arrived in Zagreb where West observed, after witnessing the behavior of a Yugoslavian, that she was now among people she understood.

It should be noted that while the nature of the book West is writing demands comments upon national characteristics, she is not racist. While she does adhere to the idea that the history of a culture does predispose a people towards a given reaction to circumstances, she does not hold one race above another because of inherent characteristics. She never hesitates, however, to make a judgement when a nation's actions seem to her to serve the will to die over the will to live.

When the Andrews arrived in Croatia they were greeted by three friends whom Rebecca had met on a previous trip. These three are representative of the unyielding differences among the South Slavs. Constantine, who accompanied them on the majority of their trip, was a Serb, which is to say a Slav member of the Orthodox Church, from Serbia. Valetta was a Croat, meaning he was a Slav member of the Roman Catholic

Church, from Dalmatia. Marko Gregorlevitch was a Croat from Croatia. While all three men were friends of Rebecca's, Constantine, whose real name was Stanislav Vinaver, became a particularly close friend of hers, as their correspondence of over a decade points out. West uses these three very cleverly through their conversation to instruct, propagandize, and illustrate the history, myths, and differences between them and the people they represent.

She recounted a brief history of Croatia, concluding, "It is not comfortable to be an inhabitant of this globe. . . . The Croats have been particularly uncomfortable." Croatia had been overrun by Asiatic hoards, invaded by the Romans and Turks, conquered by the Italians and Germans, and governed by the Austrians and Hungarians. West is superb when she writes of the ironies of history. The Croats were enslaved in the eighteenth century by the Hungarians. With their trust of Austria they sent representatives to offer their alleg-

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**Correspondence between West and Vinaver date from 1936-46. He appears to have felt some romantic inclinations towards West which she did not reciprocate. She wrote long and newsy letters to him describing such things as the abdication of Edward VIII in 1936. Rebecca West, London, to Stanislaus Vinaver, Belgrade, 14 December 1936, Photocopy, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.**

**Ibid., 50.**
liance to the Hapsburgs who in 1848 were in desperate need of loyal subjects. Yellatchitch the Croat leader spent countless hours organizing anti-Hungarian sentiment and in September, 1848 marched into Hungary with fifty thousand volunteers to defeat the Hungarian army on its way to Vienna to aid the Viennese revolutionaries against the Hapsburgs. For their troubles the Croats were rewarded with a statue. And when the Dual Monarchy was created, Hungary was awarded Croatia. The Hapsburgs, West remarked with exasperation, could not be saved from their own treacherous and ultimately suicidal tendencies.

Because West came to Yugoslavia to understand the process by which history makes the present, it was obvious to her that such a history must be traumatic on a people.

Were I to go down into the market-place, armed with the powers of witchcraft, and take a peasant by the shoulders and whisper to him, 'In your lifetime, have you known peace?' wait for his answer, shake his shoulders and transform him into his father, and ask him the same question, and transform him in turn to his father, I would never hear the word 'Yes,' if I carried my questioning of the dead back for a thousand years.  

The effects of such a past was of great interest to West, for it seemed to her that here in Croatia the evil effects of imperialism were abundantly manifest. What she began to understand about the ugly ramifications of

Ibid., 54-55.
imperialism when studying St. Augustine became vivid and personal as she toured Yugoslavia. It should be remembered that although West was half Irish, from her father's side, she did not visit Ireland until she was an older woman, and then only once. Constantine, who was no Croat, gave her the clue to what she perceived as "something alien and murderous" which had intruded itself into the "Slav pattern" in Croatia. The Croats, who are Slavs, were possessed by the West. Rebecca and Constantine were standing outside a church when a group of gipsies passed by. Despite their smiles of delight at these interesting people, the gipsies looked at them with hatred and one said, "Yes, we are gipsies." West was appalled that the gipsies would think she held them in contempt. Constantine explained that the gipsies were hated by the Germans and Austrians and that attitude had permeated the Croats, who because they had been subjects for so long, took on the attitudes of the West at the expense of their own culture. He continued, "The art of the gipsies commands no respect, for the capitalist system has discredited popular art. Also the gipsies are poor, and the capitalist system despises people who do not acquire goods. Also the West is mad about cleanliness, and the gipsies give dirt its rights...."

28Ibid., 67.
Imperialism had the insidious ability to allow a man to fight his oppressors his entire life while being seduced into accepting and exalting the values of the conqueror. What West discovered on her first trip to Yugoslavia delighted her and precipitated her return with her husband. The "authentic Slav" held that the way to make life better was to add good things to it, "whereas in the West we hold that the way to make life better is to take bad things away from it."2 The Croats, believing the lie that the conqueror must be superior, had allowed the very spirit of the Slav to slip away from them in favor of a system and culture which, while splendid in many ways, had left the Hapsburg spirit nearly dead. Not only could the Croats never be "Western" enough to be appreciated by the Austrians or Hungarians or Germans, their attempt drove them further away from their Serb brothers. They had lost their identity to the point that they choose to be killed by the reluctant Serbs on the battlefield rather than renounce their subordinate connection with the Austrians.

Now the union of South Slavs incorporated the Croats and the Serbs and many other peoples whose histories perhaps doomed them to disparity. West recorded a conversation between her friends Valetta, the Croat, and

2Ibid., 80.
Constantine, the Serb, who was also a government official in Belgrade. Valetta bitterly resented what he and the Croats perceived as an attempt to keep them from any governing positions in Belgrade.

'Then why do you not draw on us Croats for officials?' asked Valetta. 'There are many Croats whom nobody in the world would dare to call untrustworthy.' 'But how can we let you Croats be officials?' spluttered Constantine. 'You are not loyal!' 'And how asked Valetta, white to the lips, 'can we be expected to be loyal if you always treat us like this?' 'But I am telling you.' grieved Constantine, 'how can we treat you differently till you are loyal.'

The deadlock was historical, tragic, and universal, and the future could not be fortunate. West had come to see, in her own words, "what history meant in flesh and blood." Croatia bore the sad lesson that the complexity of the situation left by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire meant, as Constantine put it, "that you are never wrong, but I am always right, and we could go on talking like this for ever, till the clever way you are never wrong brought death upon us." The lesson of Croatia left West desolate.

Dalmatia proved to be vastly different from Croatia yet just as curious. The Dalmatians were as fiercely
Catholic and as fiercely anti-Yugoslav as the Croatians, but for very different reasons. The clues to their attitudes were deeply rooted in their history which was also one of physical subjection. Yet despite this similarity the Dalmatians, it seemed to West, had maintained a greater distance between themselves and the influences of their conquerors than the Croatians. West’s literary and historical technique of "inferring the universe" from the simplest object or event is used well in this section. A young Dalmatian man, who was touring a castle with West and others who happened to be with her party, exploded in anger over a trivial incident. The French and German tourists thought him to be mad, at least, and a barbarian almost certainly. But West used this young man’s rage as a launching point to explain that he was quite sane, being nothing more than a product of Dalmatian history:

... the conquest of Illyria by Rome, of Rome by the Barbarians, then three hundred years of conflict between Austria and Venice; then four hundred years of oppression by Venice, with the war against Turkey running concurrently for most of that time; a few years of hope under France, frustrated by the decay of Napoleon; a hundred years of muddling misgovernment by Austria. In such a shambles a man had to shout and rage to survive.\(^3\)

West used her tour of Dalmatia — Sushak, Senji, Rab.

\(^3\)Ibid., 119.
Split, Salona, Trogir, Korčula, and Dubrovnik, which was the Republic of Ragusa -- to survey the odd history of this Illyrian coastal region. These interesting and eclectic people, like the Croatians, had never known peace. The lost trees of Dalmatia become symbolic of the economic rape inflicted on them for many hundreds of years. Most noticeable to the eye of the visitor to the coast were the ravaged forests. Amidst the horrors of imperialism in Dalmatia stands the brief rule of the French in 1806 under Marshal Marmont. One learned Dalmatian even suggested to West that it would have been a good thing if the French had stayed a little longer. Marmont loved Dalmatia and, however incongruous, brought with him the ideals of the French Revolution. His governing of Dalmatia was enlightened, for a time, but soon the unreasonable tendencies of Napoleon interfered.

Perhaps the worst of the imperial trials came from the Turks. Not only was there constant warfare but Venice offered tribute to Turkey for safety by giving them what was left of Dalmatia for their pleasure. "These people of Dalmatia gave the bread out of their mouths to save us of Western Europe from Islam. . . ."²⁴ West, who believed that there was not a worse fate

²⁴Ibid., 137.
suffered than by the Christian provinces under the Ottoman Empire, felt great gratitude to these people whom she saw now after hundreds of years had the opportunity "to repair their destiny." But what of the Dalmatians and Yugoslavia? The problem most clearly manifests itself when friends of the Andrews' felt morally unable to take them to a carnival because the proceeds would go to institutions the government in Belgrade had founded. When asked if Belgrade were not better than Austria or Hungary, they replied, "Yes, of course," but nonetheless, they despised it. West took this opportunity to make a point that is universal in its application. Yugoslavia would not work if these people had the last say, not because it provided less than existed before, but because these people possessed a historic concentration of opposition. Dalmatia and Croatia here resembled Ireland. "A proud people acquire a habit of resistance to foreign oppression, and by the time they have driven out their oppressors they have forgotten that agreement is a pleasure and that a society which has attained tranquility will be able to pursue many delightful ends." Instead they argue about the injustices left over from their oppressors and forfeit the benefit of independence.

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*Ibid.

*Ibid., 82.
These people who had lived and died to realize the creation of a South Slav state now, by their actions, provided it very little chance of survival. West attributed to her husband the observation that "these people are born and trained rebels." Henry saw that their history might very well prohibit them from fitting into the parameters of a modern state. They are, he muses, "children of free cities" who cannot but conceive of centralized government as evil. Throughout all the invasions and occupations, the Dalmatians remained in relative control of their own "firesides." While the world whirled about them they developed a culture and political philosophy based on opposition. As Slavs within Yugoslavia they settled comfortably into opposition to the Serbs who they perceived as controlling and thus destroying Belgrade. And as unfortunately happened, it would take outside opposition before the South Slavs worked towards the idea of Union and then it would be too late.

As the Andrews' trip continued southeast into Herzegovina the diversity and difficulties of Yugoslavia became more apparent. They, for example, had not encountered a single Orthodox monastery until they left

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the staunchly Catholic Croatia and Dalmatia. Herzegovina bore evidence of yet greater problems. The large Turkish population gave witness to hundreds of years of oppressive Ottoman rule. Turkey, by 1937 however, had abandoned her people in the Balkans in proportion to her waning power at home. After a particularly disagreeable experience with the Moslems of Herzegovina, West commented, "I hate the corpses of empires, they stink as nothing else." Her comment was general, not directed at any one empire, but at all of them. Even the seemingly least destructive empire on the Illyrian peninsula, the French, ended in tragedy. Treachery and destruction befell both nations when Napoleon annulled the independence, which he had vowed to defend, of the only independent Slav community in Balkan territory, the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik). Marshal Marmont's efforts to develop the country came to naught. "It would seem," West said, "that empire degrades those it uplifts as much as those it holds down in subjugation."

Because the province of Bosnia housed the city of Sarajevo, West spends the majority of that chapter discussing events surrounding the assassination of June, 1914. Bosnia bore unique scars from the Turkish and

**Ibid., 180.**

**Ibid., 284.**
Austrian occupations. Her long time Turkish rulers were gone but the vestiges of their domination could be seen in the often tragic lives of the Moslems who remained in Bosnia. West was in Sarajevo when the Turkish Prime Minister and Minister of War came to visit the Moslem population. The grumblings of the resentful Slav population mixed uncomfortably with the excitement of the Moslems, who went to great lengths to prepare for the arrival of their honored guests. West's husband asked Constantine, who had rejoined them in Sarajevo, why such a visit would still evoke such hostility when the Turkish Empire had been expelled in 1878. Constantine explained that when the Austrians came they placed the "Slav Moslems" above the Christians, treating them as favored sons. The Austrians did not like the Moslems any more than any Christians would but they believed in divide et impera. So it was that the residue of the Ottoman Empire maintained its ability to bear witness to Bosnia's secondary status well into the twentieth century. West found it telling that when the "Westernized" leaders of Turkey visited, they seemed to feel little more than disgust for these Moslems who represented the shame of their defeat and ties to the old ways they sought to cast off. "They had said not one word of the ancient tie that linked the Bosnian Moslems to the Turks, nor had they
made any reference to Islam. As the Moslem population, who had gone to some trouble to have their fezes ironed the day before, went away from the rally "slowly and silently, as those who have been sent away empty." As a sidelight West recalled that portion of history that "had it not been for the intolerance of the Papacy we would not have had Turkey in Europe for five hundred years." In the eleventh century a sect called the Bogomils, who took some of their doctrine from the Manichean heresy, formed a church in Bosnia that was independent of both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. They were persecuted by both Churches, but most especially by the Catholics who ruled that they should be burned alive. The Orthodox Church was not the more lenient, only it was engaged in the business of survival itself against the Turks. The Papacy ordered a crusade against the Turks, the Arians, and the heretic Bosnians who had accepted Bogomilianism. The Turks offered the later group protection if they would identify themselves as Moslems and not attack the Ottoman Empire. With little real choice, they did this. Bosnia thus became almost wholly identified as Moslem, and the Turks

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41 Ibid., 317.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 301.
moved on towards Hungary and Central Europe. As it is with imperialism and intolerance, there was not a winner to be had in the lot.

In what the reader feels is the climax of the first volume, West depicts the assassination at Sarajevo in 1914 as the culmination of many national and personal histories laced with irony and dedicated to the forces of death. Standing on the balcony in Sarajevo that Franz Ferdinand stood on the day he was murdered, West began the story of this man whose death would matter more to the whole of Europe than his life ever would have. The figure of Franz Ferdinand was at once tragic and comic. His violent excesses were a cause of concern to many, including his wife, who thought he might be given to a mental breakdown. His favorite pastime went far beyond the sport of hunting, evolving into a massacre of millions of beasts, while abandoning all sporting restraints.**

Because he was a Hapsburg his whole life was based on privilege. Franz Ferdinand would never have been heir-apparent had it not been for the death of Elizabeth's son, Crown Prince Rudolf, who had been raised by his grandmother, the Archduchess Sophie. West, who began the book recounting the tragic and sinister

**Ibid., 335.
personal history of Franz Joseph's family, in the final section of the first volume brings it to its public finale. The literary technique of coming full circle is representative of West's belief in the unity of experience and the continuity of history. It also underscores the idea that the individual and his choices matter in the grand scheme of history. In this case, the Archduchess Sophie, herself a product of Hapsburg history, by undermining any attempt at change by her daughter-in-law, Elizabeth, contributed to the demise of her children who were in line to the throne, thereby, leaving Franz Ferdinand, a man unliked by all, to be thrust upon Europe. There is of course, no guarantee and very little evidence that Europe would have been better with Rudolf than Franz Ferdinand, only that there would have been a chance of history playing itself out differently. West's most general implication, then, is that human choices matter.

Franz Ferdinand's marriage to Sophie Chotek and his political opinions set him at odds with Franz Josef and made him an unpopular figure in Austria. The Archduke was forced into a morganatic marriage with the woman he loved because she was not viewed as sufficiently noble. Both husband and wife endured continual insults because of this arrangement by Prince Montenuovo who ferociously
watched over the rules of Hapsburg ceremony. West says of this man that he "was one of the strangest figures in Europe of our time; a character that Shakespeare decided at the last moment not to use in King Lear or Othello, and laid by so carelessly that it fell out of art into life." 45

However reluctantly, Franz Josef and Franz Ferdinand were influenced by the destructive ideas of Conrad von Hotzendorf, whom Franz Josef had made his Chief of General Staff in 1906. Conrad believed the only way to reassert the greatness of the Empire was to launch an offensive war. 46 Though Franz Josef had dismissed Conrad in 1911 because of his foreign policy aggressiveness, Franz Ferdinand used his influence to have him reinstated in 1912 as Chief of the General Staff. In 1913 the Prime Minister of Serbia offered to come to Austria to work out points of dispute with the Empire, but Berchtold, the swayable Minister of Foreign Affairs,


Influenced by Conrad refused to see him.\*\* To make matters worse, Conrad convinced Berchtold to withhold information of the offer to both Franz Josef and Franz Ferdinand. The heir-apparent, it was clear, did not want war with Serbia, but those who advised him were of a different mind. Franz Ferdinand was surrounded by enemies in his own court and country.

Despite Franz Ferdinand's unpopularity, his decision to go to Sarajevo on 28 June 1918 was entirely his own. That date held special significance for him as fourteen years ago to the day he had been forced to swear an oath relinquishing his children's claim to the throne. Still the decision to go to Serbia on that day was more curious because it was St. Vitus Day, the anniversary of the battle of Kossovo where in 1398 the Serbs had lost their country and their independence to the Turks. It was an official day of national mourning until 1912 when, during the Balkan War, the Serbs had defeated the Turks at Kumanovo. In addition to this knowledge, Franz Ferdinand was well aware that public opinion among the Serbs did not run in his favor. He was known go to great lengths to read the opposition newspapers published by minority

"\*\*Of Berchtold, Fay says, "He was as helpless and incompetent a person as was ever called to fill a responsible position in time of danger." Fay, The Origins of the World War, 1: 469."
groups within his realm."

He must have known that if he went to Bosnia and conducted manoeuvres on the Serbian frontier just before St. Vitus Day and on the actual anniversary paid a state visit to Sarajevo, he would be understood to be mocking the South Slav world, to be telling them that though the Serbs might have freed themselves from the Turks there were still many Slavs under the Austrian’s yoke. To pay that visit was an act so suicidal that one fumbles the pages of the history books to find if there is not some explanation of his going, if he was not subject to some compulsion. But if ever a man went anywhere of his own free will, Franz Ferdinand went so to Sarajevo."

The set of circumstances that brought the car carrying the royal couple to a stop in front of Gavrilo Princip are confounding. West spent considerable time examining the details of Franz Ferdinand’s day, along with the car ride that led him and his wife to their deaths. There was little security present at Sarajevo, for the Archduke had failed to notify the Austrian and Hungarian governments of his itinerary, and the Bosnian and Hercegovinan authorities were incompetent in their lack of security preparedness. What security was available to him that June day in Bosnia was not informed of the route his car would travel. The couple had decided at the last minute to detour to a hospital to

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**Fay, The Origins of the World War, 2: 21.**

**Ibid., 343-44.**

**Vladimir Dedijer, The Road to Sarajevo (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 317.**
visit a wounded Austrian officer, who had been injured in a bomb blast meant for the Archduke earlier that day, but incredibly enough the chauffeur was not informed of the change in route. The confused chauffeur then proceeded to stop the car directly in front of the only man in Sarajevo with a gun who seemed to have the courage on that day to pull the trigger. And so "at last the bullets had been coaxed out of the reluctant revolver to the bodies of the eager victims."

Not only did West retrace the events of 28 June 1914, she explored in some depth the events following the death of the royal couple. Prince Montenuovo was in charge of making arrangements for the bodies. He found he was able to torture them with etiquette in death as he had in life. He arranged for the train bearing their bodies to arrive at night. The train moreover was splattered with the blood of a railwayman who had been hit at a crossing. He attempted unsuccessfully to forbid the new heir, the Archduke Charles, from meeting the train. He tried to separate the coffins so that Sophie would not lie with her husband, a gesture Franz Josef forbade. He did manage, however, to have the level of

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There were, apparently, other conspirators who lost courage and failed to make a move against the Archduke.

Ibid., 361.
her coffin placed beneath his to indicate her inferior status. Her coffin was decorated with black fan and white gloves, the symbol of a lady in waiting. The only flowers sent were from the dead couple's children and a few foreign dignitaries. While Franz Josef attended the service the chapel was closed immediately afterwards so that the public would have no opportunity to pay their respects. Franz Ferdinand had made arrangements that he and his wife should be buried together in their castle at Arstetten on the Danube. Montenuovo abandoned responsibility for the coffins after the service, leaving the municipal undertaker in charge of transporting them. The Prince managed to delay the departure of the coffins until late in the night creating further confusion. The bodies arrived at one o'clock in the morning in a driving thunderstorm. For whatever reason the station had not been prepared properly to receive them, which outraged mourners who were "obsessed with etiquette and pomp." To make matters worse the horses who pulled the hearse to the castle, while on the ferry, were frightened by the thunder and reared as the coffins began to slip perilously close to the water.

The abominable treatment of these unpopular people insured that their memory would become almost sacred. West said that Austria chose to "whip herself into a fury
of loyalty to Franz Ferdinand's memory." West did a significant amount of research on the historiography of this topic, including the allegation that the Russian government was also involved in planning the assassination, and concluded that neither the Russian or Serbian Governments were responsible for the death of the Archduke. Two items should be noted at this point. While West absolves the Serbian government of direct, conspiratorial responsibility, she is well aware of the suspicious connections between the "Black Hand" and those within the Serbian government. Also, West falls into a common trap for historians writing about the South Slavs of adopting a "pet Balkan people." It was a problem she recognized, yet in some ways, failed to avoid.

Within the body of the text of Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, West briefly mentioned that some renowned historians had mistakenly connected the conspirators to the Serbian government. Other historians, she claimed, had repeated this misinformation. She stated that one famous historian had claimed definitively that both the Russian and Serbian Governments were involved in a

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53Ibid., 365.
conspiracy to kill Franz Ferdinand. When she asked this historian for his evidence he had nothing to show her. Both Harry Elmer Barnes and Sidney Bradshaw Fay fall into this category. West believed Fay was biased against the Serbs not only because of the leanings of *The Origins of the World War*, but also because he contributed a preface to the English edition of *Apis und Este*, which she claimed was Bruno Brehm's "venomously anti-Slav trilogy." West consulted Professor Seton-Watson and he confirmed her findings that evidence of complicity did not exist to the best of his knowledge and research. West stated in her bibliography that the story of Russian complicity was alleged in In der Mauer's *Die Jugoslawie einst und jetzt* and M.W. Fodor's *South of Hitler*. When asked for documentary support Fodor replied to West that "these facts were generally known." West never received information that convinced her that either government was directly involved in the assassination. And certainly, she believed, that the claim by the Austrian Government, which justified their declaration of war, was unfounded. The original allegation stemmed from the fact that the bombs thrown at the Archduke on the day

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54 Ibid., 365.
55 Ibid., 1156.
56 Ibid., 1154.
of his assassination had been issued by the Serbian State Arsenal at Kraguyevats. While this is accurate enough it is also true that such bombs were exceedingly easy to obtain as a result of their general issue during the Balkan War. Further it would be impossible to construe that war with Austria, at that time, would have any but the most deleterious effects on Serbia, as indeed it did. The Serbian Government bowed to most of the demands insisted upon by the Austro-Hungarian Empire except those few that would have completely obscured her sovereignty.

West lays the bulk of the blame for the deaths on the Black Hand, a Serbian terrorist organization. The leader of this murderous organization was Dragutin Dimitriyevitch, code named "Apis," head of the Intelligence Bureau of the Serbian General Staff. The Serbian Government was at that time involved in measures intended to destroy the Black Hand. While the conspirators did have some contact with the Black Hand, West produces evidence which leads one to believe that they were never taken seriously by the organization. None of the boys were trained soldiers and none shot well or threw bombs with any accuracy. "I leave readers to judge if the Russian General Staff, or "Apis," when attempting to involve the Russian General Staff in a European war, would have relied on the naive group of
conspirators. . . ."\textsuperscript{57} In fact, West knew a man, a Herzegovinian, "a remarkable shot and a seasoned soldier, who placed himself at the disposition of the 'Black Hand' to assassinate any oppressor of the Slav people. His offer was never accepted."\textsuperscript{58}

Modern histories of this incident remain divided regarding the culpability of the Serbian and Russian Governments. Dedijer contends that there is evidence which confirms that the Serbian government, under Pasic, ordered civil and military authorities to investigate allegations that armed, young men had come into Bosnia from Serbia. Pasic also ordered an investigation of Colonel Apis. Whether the Serbian government "officially" informed Vienna of the investigations is another disputed matter. Dedijer confirms West's account that, at any rate, Jovanovic-Pizon did inform, "unofficially" Count Billinski that the Archduke might face danger if he traveled to Bosnia or Hercegovina.\textsuperscript{59} West never claimed that elements within the Serbian government were not aware of a threat to the Archduke, nor that Colonel Apis was not a terrorist. She does deny, however, that there was a large-scale conspiracy on the part of the govern-

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 1154.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., 369.
\textsuperscript{59}Dedijer, \textit{The Road to Sarajevo}, 366-96.
ment to kill Franz Ferdinand. As shown, many later historians who have had access to the archives of some of the countries involved, a luxury West did not have, have concluded much the same thing about the existence of a full-scale conspiracy. In fact, a general survey of more recent literature about World War I reveals that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is widely cited in bibliographies, used as a source of information, and often quoted from.

Historiography aside, the Austrian government took the opportunity of the assassination to declare war on Serbia. The deception and culpability of Count Berchtold, West believed, was responsible for turning a localized and minor incident into a world war. Serbia's acquiescence to the Austrian demands was as complete as a nation could give and maintain its sovereignty. Berchtold rejected completely Serbia's attempts at reconciliation, while giving the same treatment to any attempt at a diplomatic solution. War was declared on 28

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July 1914. The war that resulted was so comprehensive in scope and destruction it all but obscured Serbia and the original pretense for war. In October the trial began that would attempt to determine what role if any Serbia played in the assassination. Typical "of the insanity" of Europe, war had been declared ten weeks before the trial began.

West gave considerable attention to the trial and the fates of the defendants: among them, Mehmedbasic, Chabrinovitch, Grabez, Popovicth, Illic, and Princip. The reports from the trial were biased because only German and Austria correspondents covered it. The war having begun no French or English were allowed, and the Americans, who could not follow Serbo-Croat, got their information from their German colleagues. The reports and transcripts of the trial were sent to Vienna where they were lost. In fact, it was not until the 1920s that a carbon copy was discovered in Sarajevo. West read the French translation of the report for her work and cautioned that care should be taken in consulting the German version. The trial was a sham with one defense attorney quoted as saying, "Illustrious tribunal, after all we have heard, it is particularly painful for me, as a Croat, to conduct the defense of a Serb."1 With such

1Ibid., 377.
a defense, the defendants stood no chance of obtaining a fair trial. Even as they were perfunctorily sentenced to death, except those who were minors, a Vienna bureaucrat, Friedrich von Wiesner, who visited the trials, wired home: "There is nothing to indicate that the Serbian government knew about the plot." Princip never denied his guilt, nor did the others directly involved. They gave as justification for their crime the "poisoned atmosphere of the oppressed provinces." Chabrinovitch, who made the first bomb attempt on Franz Ferdinand's life, had been a pacifist and was never convinced that their crime was morally defensible, as his speech to the court made clear.

West and her husband were able to meet the sister of Chabrinovitch while in Bosnia. She produced photographs of the assassination and of the Austrian cruelty that followed. Many innocent Bosnians were put to death, West claimed. She saw pictures of Bosnian peasant women and others, who could have scarcely heard of Franz Ferdinand, hanging from trees. Chabrinovitch himself died a slow and horrible death while in prison. Historians then and now claim that all of the young men involved in the

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43 West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, 376.
murder had tuberculosis. Chabrinovitch's sister, who was a dentist with medical training, disputed this claim. In addition Professor Seton-Watson and others made the claim that Chabrinovitch's father was a Bosnian spy for the Austro-Hungarian Government. West learned that while no evidence appeared to support this, the story was begun by a young Bosnian who wrote a great deal on the history of the assassination having known those involved. It happened that he had fallen in love with Chabrinovitch's sister, whom West had met, and been spurned by her. Constantine suggested that the story originated more from personal motives than public evidence.

West, her husband, and Constantine spent a great deal of time in Sarajevo tracing the steps of Franz Ferdinand and Sophie Chotek on the day of their death. They spent even more time following the event to its conclusion, in terms of the participants themselves. The incongruities and perplexities brought West to the conclusion that "the Sarajevo attentat is mysterious as history is mysterious, as life is mysterious." The assassination provided West a microcosm of events that so closely replicated life it almost demanded that sense be made of it. That the event was "loose and purposeless" made it a symbol of life. Her remarks

regarding events in Sarajevo reveal her own discouragement with the history that bore most directly on her own life.

... this Sarajevo attentat was in these inconsistencies an apt symbol of life: which is loose and purposeless, which weaves a close pattern and doggedly pursues its ends, which is unpredictable and illogical, which follows a straight line from cause to effect, which is bad, which is good. It shows that the human will can do anything, it shows that accident does everything. ... It shows also that moral judgement sets itself an impossible task. The soul should choose life. But when the Bosnians chose life, and murdered Franz Ferdinand, they chose death for the French and Germans and English, and if the French and Germans and English had been able to choose life they would have chosen death for the Bosnians. The sum will not add up.*

Nevertheless, it is the job of the individual never to cease trying to "add up the sum." West's conclusions are not always so existentially impotent. Her best suggestions were put forth when she discussed the abolition of empires, the implementation of such would have eliminated a considerable portion of this unfortunate history.

*Ibid., 381-382.
CHAPTER VIII

BLACK LAMB AND GREY FALCON II

West began the chapter about Serbia with the introduction of Gerda, the wife of Constantine. Gerda, who was German, was the type of German, whose presence in the center of Europe was becoming an increasing menace to the rest of the continent. Gerda, despite being married to a Yugoslav official, despised everything Slavic. It is a powerful literary technique that West developed with the inclusion of Gerda half-way through the book. Black Lamb and Grey Falcon begins with the description of the Andrew’s traveling companions into Yugoslavia. These German travelers, despite choosing Yugoslavia as the site of their holiday, found the country tolerable only because they were certain to be around other German tourists. This and other attitudes West found baffling, but dismissed, as her excitement about arriving in Yugoslavia nudged out her concern. The introduction of Gerda brings again to the fore the presence of the ominous ideology sweeping Europe. And in a perfect circle, West ends the book by describing the inevitable
consequence of this ideology: the bombardment of Yugoslavia by the Nazis.

While Rebecca, Henry, Constantine, and Gerda were still in the railway station in Belgrade, an issue arose that West believed was symptomatic of the whole fascist ideology. As Rebecca and Gerda stood waiting for their husbands to attend to the luggage, Gerda took from Rebecca's hands the book she had been reading. It was Patience Kemp's, *The Healing Ritual*, an informed, anthropological study on the folk-medicine of the Balkan Slavs. Gerda smiled and shook her head condescendingly while looking at the book. West, who thought the book an excellent and admirable study, asked Gerda if she had read it. "'No, but I do not believe it. I am not a Mystik,'" she replied. West responded that it was "'not that sort of book at all...','" as she began explaining the credentials of the author, the reputation of the publishing house (Faber and Faber), and most importantly, her own opinion as one who had read the book. Gerda was unmoved while West insisted again that it was a "'work of great learning.'" West tried to understand why this bothered her so. "Miss Kemp could obviously look after herself and I did not care what Gerda thought of my intelligence, but there seemed to me something against nature in judging a book without having read it and in
sticking to that judgment in spite of positive assurances from someone who had read it.\(^1\) West tried again to convince Gerda of the value of the book, however:

She [Gerda] turned away so that she stood at right angles to me, her smile soared above us: I could see her spirit, buoyed up by a sense of the folly of myself, of Miss Kemp, of Messrs. Faber, mounting and expanding till it filled the high vaults of the railway station. Unconstrained by any sense of reality, there was no reason why it should not.\(^2\)

Nazi and Fascist doctrine was dangerous, according to West, precisely because it was unconstrained by any sense of reality. The blind hatred and fanatical obedience stemmed, collectively and individually, from the refusal to accept reality as it was. Preferring to live in a fantasy world that held all things German, for example, to be superior, such ideology denigrated any variant. Gerda, who accepted and reveled in the idea of German superiority, would prove to be a most trying traveling companion.

Constantine, the Serb, who should have enjoyed the most showing his guests Serbia, was oppressed by the attitude of his wife. The union of these two people demonstrated effectively West’s point about imperialism. While Constantine retained a deep love of things Serbian

\(^1\)West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 458-59.

\(^2\)Ibid., 459.
he had married a German who represented, to both of them, a racial and cultural superiority. Her arrogance prohibited her from enjoying or appreciating the country in which she lived, which forced her into a bitter world, increasingly unfamiliar with reality. Constantine, in some subtle ways, accepted his wife’s view of the world and of himself. While in his soul he loved Serbian tradition and culture, in his professional pursuits he sought to make Yugoslavia like the "great" Western powers. As a man moved by prestige, he accepted, however subtly, the notion that all higher culture in the Balkans came from Germany and Austria. He lived a contradiction that manifested itself in his unhappy marriage to this woman who hated Slavs and Jews, of which he was both.

In the chapter on Serbia, West briefly reached back into early Serbian history but concentrated primarily on the creation of modern Serbia. She made the observation that because the Serbs never had a great and powerful leader, on the model of Peter the Great or Catherine the Great, and because they had never learned obedience to a centralized power, they could not "joyously become subordinate atoms in a vast Marxist system." Perhaps more than most Soviet block nations, Yugoslavia's post-war history bears this out.

Throughout the chapter Gerda is used to represent Western standards, as opposed to her husband who is used to represent Serbian tradition and standards. Gerda assumed time and again that the Andrews would find her ways superior because they too were Western. When their attitudes failed to correspond with hers, which was on almost all occasions, she reacted with the most inappropriate rage. In the chapter on Serbia, West is able to explain her thoughts about capitalism and art by using Gerda as a prototype of western problems.

As West pointed out earlier in the book, capitalism created a class of people who found themselves traditionless. "Brought up without gardens, to work on machines," they lacked the rootedness craftsmanship engenders. The disempowered class that was created began the eternal struggle against the status quo. The class that was raised to new heights of power, while remaining equally traditionless, tighten their grip on the status quo. The attitude of those who found themselves within this system was surprisingly condescending to those who had the good fortune to have remained outside of it. Thus, Gerda

"It is doubtful whether the wife of Stanislav Vinaver (Constantine) was actually as terrible as Gerda. Glendinning makes the obvious point that, in reality, Stanislav was very much taken with West, a condition likely noticed and unappreciated by Gerda. Nevertheless, West used Gerda effectively to illustrate legitimate points."
illustrated the Western attitude toward Serbian tradition at a tea party in her home in Belgrade which the Andrews were invited to. While admiring the cakes and pastries on her own table, Gerda explained contemptuously that a Serbian housewife would have spent hours baking cakes and cookies for her guests, which she said with pride, she had obviously not done. Gerda assumed Rebecca and Henry would uphold this "cool, powerful, unhurried ideal against the Serbian barbarians who liked a woman to get hot over a stove."®

But we knew that when one goes into a shop and buys a cake one gets nothing but a cake, which may be very good, but it is only a cake; whereas if one goes into the kitchen and makes a cake because some people one respects and probably likes are coming to eat at one's table, one is striking a low note on a scale that is struck higher up by Beethoven and Mozart. We believed it better to create than to pay. In fact, England had had a bourgeoisie long before Germany, and we had found out that the bourgeois loses more than he gains by giving up the use of his own hands; but there is no wider gulf in the universe than yawns between those on the hither and thither side of vital experience.*

Following the tea party, Constantine informed the Andrews that Gerda had insisted on accompanying them to Macedonia. Constantine, who was to be the Andrew's guest on the trip, could not talk her out of it. "My husband and I stood staring at each other, feeling like the

®Ibid., 622.

*Ibid., 622-23.
people in Kafka's books who are sentenced by an invisible and nameless authority for some unnamed sin to a fantastic and ineluctable punishment." Thus, they began their journey into Macedonia.

West thought that Macedonia was the most beautiful country she had ever been to and was most excited to show it to her husband. However, Gerda, whose presence was overwhelmingly negative, no doubt contributed to the tone of the Macedonian chapter. The journey to Macedonia began at Eastertime as West had planned. Gerda's antics almost caused the foursome to miss the Easter service West so much wanted her husband to witness. "It seemed to me for a minute that there was going to be no Easter, that Gerda had annulled it, . . ." The struggles Henry and Rebecca had with Gerda throughout the Macedonian part of their journey took on a significance larger than life, against a backdrop of heightened tension in Europe.

One of the differences West explored between east and west, as well as the growing differences between westerns, were the diverse positions taken regarding the value of pleasure. The difference between the Serb and the Turk had been illuminated to her "at every turn of the street" in Skoplje. West determined, however, that


*Idib.*, 634.
the greatest difference existed not between Serbs and Turks, but between Serbs, Turks, and themselves, as opposed to Gerda. After an all day festival that included dancing, beautiful native clothes, food, and other reasonably agreeable activities, Gerda and Rebecca exchanged opinions. Rebecca found that beauty, whether it came in the form of the gipsies garments, or by way of their native dances, was valuable and constructive because it brought joy. Gerda could not see anything positive or experience any pleasure because she found these people racially disgusting. She said to Rebecca, "It is because you are a foreigner, you do not understand these people. . . . You should see that they are nothing but dirty and uncivilized savages, who ought not to be in Europe at all." *

The trip continued and the differences increased. But West found delight in the places, the people, and the activities she had remembered so fondly. Bishop Nikolai was one of the people she wanted to see again. He was the Bishop of Zhitcha and Ochrid, but to West he was a magician. By his performance of the Eastern Church's religious rites, he made manifest spiritual concepts too deep for words. West said, "The congregation had realized what people in the West usually do not know:

*Ibid., 661.
that the state of mind suitable for conducting the practical affairs of daily life is not suitable for discovering the ultimate meaning of life." The Bishop and the congregation were able to perform the Mass with a superb comprehension of the message.

that goodness is adorable and that there is an evil part in man which hates it, that there was once a poor man born of a poor woman who was perfectly good and was therefore murdered by evil men, and in his defeat was victorious, since it is far better to be crucified than to crucify, while his murderers were conquered beyond the imagination of conquerors; and that this did not happen once and far away, but is repeated every day in all hearts."

Following the ceremony the foursome was invited to share in the feast with the Bishop and some others. During the meal, in a traditional ritual, Bishop Nikolai spoke the words, "Christ is risen" three times, to which the people respond, "Indeed He is risen." Following that he passed out hard boiled eggs with "an air of generosity, ... as if he were the conduit for a force greater than himself." In a move that evidenced her complete disdain and unconcern for the ritual she was witnessing, Gerda picked up a bowl of eggs and began to pass them out to some nearby children. West responded that, "this was the

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10 Ibid., 713.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 722.
moment we all fear when we are little, the moment when some breach of decorum would put an event into a shape so disgusting that nobody who saw it could bear to go on living. . . . The word 'shocking' has a meaning."

That situation lead to an inevitable conflict during their next outing, which happened to be, unfortunately, at a German war memorial. Henry, who spent his childhood divided between Germany and England, would naturally have the utmost sympathy for this reminder of the death of young Germans. This memorial, however, was built on the model of a fortress whose presence, according to Henry was "dominating the town Bitolj." Henry thought the memorial most inappropriate because "it is an insult to this country [Yugoslavia], for it makes a threat of return." Gerda, of course, was beside herself with joy and pride at this temporal expression of German superiority. She made, however, the unfortunate choice of asking Henry what he thought of it. "I don't like it," he replied, "because it pays no sort of respect to the individuals who are buried in it and because it is a tactless reminder of the past to an invaded people." Gerda could not have been more insulted. Better Henry

13Ibid.
14Ibid., 763.
15Ibid.
should have beat her than insult "the German blood." The reader at this point of the book, almost wishes he would choose the former.

While Henry grieved about making a scene "over a lot of dead boys," which he felt was "worse than the Bishop's feast," Rebecca remarked, in what is a classic summation of Nazi doctrine, "It is all part of the same thing, . . . Religion and death are not so important as being a German, nothing must exist except Germanity." Later, Henry and Rebecca went on to discuss what they believed to be the root of the problem. Actually, the reader is presented with a long monologue attributed to Henry. The monologue, however, is remarkably like the thought processes of West herself. At any rate, Gerda is perceived as one who has "no sense of process." She did not see the world operating in terms of cause and effect. She wanted the results without the effort. Indeed, "she has shut herself off from the possibility of feeling mercy, since pain is a process and not a result." Two conditions, Henry believed, could account for a view of the world Gerda's. First, people have lost sight of the importance of the process. They forget that everything "which is not natural is artificial and that

1"Ibid., 764.

2"Ibid., 799-800.
artifice is painful and difficult." Second, "is that people have acquired a terror of losing the results of the process." Henry used the example of a loaf of bread "born in the virginity of cellophane." Either through imperialism or a "modern machine civilization," it was possible for a people to be unaware of the process involved: they are able to look at a loaf of bread and "not realize that miracles of endurance and ingenuity had to be performed before the wheat grew, and the mill ground, and the oven baked." Such people live in fear that they might lose everything artificial. They develop a theory that bases their social value on "being able to put down money and buy results of processes without being concerned in the processes themselves." Therefore, Gerda considered learning to bake bread a "sentence of death," for, in her view, it was demeaning to her social value.

Henry applied his theory to Germany, to predict what this sort of shortsightedness might lead to. He had already witnessed in German banking the results of a system that had disregarded the laws of causality. Looking at the broader picture, he predicted an empire

18Ibid., 801-02.
19Ibid.
20Ibid., 802.
built up by Germany would not last long, but that it would be terrible. The new German empire, already in evidence by 1937, would not have the advantage of religion. The Turks, despite their inefficiency and maladministration, had Islam to unify them and give them purpose, but the Germans could not use Christianity because Christianity is on the side of mercy and the new Germany did not have mercy as a point of reference. A new pagan religion might be developed, but it would not have time to seep into the blood of the people before the inefficiency of the empire brought it down.\(^{21}\) Rebecca, speaking through Henry, did not prove to be far off the mark.

At one point in the chapter, West addressed herself to a problem that was, at once, relevant to this book, to a battlefield, and to the whole of life. Why was the battlefield of Kaimakshalan important? What happened there, and where is it?

The answer is too long, as long indeed, as this book, which hardly anybody will read by reason of its length. Here is the calamity of our modern life, we cannot know all the things which it is necessary for our survival that we should know. This battlefield is deprived of its essence in the minds of men, because of their fears and ignorances; it cannot even establish itself as a fact, because it is crowded out by a plethora of facts.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\)Ibid., 804-05.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 773.
The glimmer of discouragement West betrayed at this point is born out in her private correspondence during the period in which she wrote *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. All of her questions would not be answered even if she were able to write five volumes and people would actually read them.

The culmination of the chapter on Macedonia, and indeed, to some degree, of the entire book, is the description of the black lamb and the rock. Without Henry, who had been called away for the evening by a business problem, Rebecca traveled the countryside with friends she had met on her previous trip, to witness the fertility rituals on St. George’s Day. The final ritual she witnessed took place in Sheep’s Field on a huge rock that was colored dark with blood. Fertility was supposed to be granted to those who shed the blood of a cock or a black lamb, which they did in some considerable numbers and had done for many hundreds of years. Children believed to have been conceived as a result of this mystical sacrifice were to be brought back and marked with the sign of the rock which was from the blood of an animal slain again upon this rock. The slaughter disgusted West not because it was an unreasonable ritual, for she had seen many rituals the evening before that.

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were based no more on logic than was this, but because these actions were discreditable to humanity.

There is a possibility that barrenness due to the mind could be aided by a rite that evoked love and broke down peevish desires to be separate and alone, or that animated a fatigued nature by refreshing from its hidden sources. But this could do nothing that it promised. Women do not get children by adding to the normal act of copulation the slaughter of a lamb, the breaking of a jar, the decapitation of a cock, the stretching of wool through blood and grease. If there was a woman whose womb could be unsealed by witnessing a petty and pointless act of violence, by seeing a jet of blood fall from a lamb's throat on a rock wet with stale and stinking blood, her fertility would be the reverse of motherhood, she would have children for the purpose of hating them.24

This ritual was to West the gross evidence that man is in love with cruelty and death. It was evidence that sacrifice was cherished above love, that the crucifixion of Christ was an act more frequently imitated on the earth than the life of Christ. "I knew the rock well," West continued. "I had lived under the shadow of it all my life. All our Western thought is founded on this repulsive pretense that pain is the proper price of any good thing."25 And so evil won the day, as the pious once again glorified the cruelty Christ came to expose.

West's visit to Old Serbia took her to the battleground of Kossovo, which completed the explanation

24Ibid., 826.
25Ibid., 827.
for the second half of the title of this book. Five hundred years of enslavement by the Turks began in 1398 when King Lazar and his armies fell to the invaders. West felt keenly the significance of Kossovo. It was a holy place not only for Serbs but for any one who understood that there, on that field, a people had their death demonstrated to them through the "annihilation of their will." The Serbs were defeated at the accursed battlefield three times. In an irony of history, when the Serbs finally drove the Turks out in 1912, it was not at Kossovo but at Kumanovo.

At Kossovo, West found in the children who recited the story of the defeat and humiliation by the Turks, and the liberation in 1912 resulting eventually in the creation of Yugoslavia, to be a constructive type of nationalism. She used the example of these children's recitations and singing of ancient songs to make the point again that nationalism often serves the positive purpose of rebuilding a national character when an imperial power had done its best to destroy it. "There is not the smallest reason for confounding nationalism, which is the desire of a people to be itself, with imperialism, which is the desire of a people to prevent other peoples from being themselves." West's ultimate

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26 Ibid., 843.
reasoning for this view stems from her philosophy of art and life. Each human being must be encouraged to cultivate his consciousness to the fullest degree if he is to contribute to the information humanity has about itself.

Every human being is of sublime value, because his experience, which must be in some measure unique, gives him a unique view of reality, and the sum of such views should go far to giving us the complete picture of reality, which the human race must attain if it is ever to comprehend its destiny.^[27]

Thus the passion and grief experienced by those Serbs who visited Kossovo not only helped them to regain their sense of national purpose and pride but also in some ultimate way, perhaps, contributed to the quest of humankind to understand their treatment in the universe.

West experienced a revelation at Kossovo that began to make sense out of history for her. She was discussing the reason for the Serbian defeat at Kossovo with Constantine and Dragutin, the Andrews' driver for a portion of their journey. West was under the impression that because the Slav princes were divided Tsar Lazar could not mount an effective attack or defence. Constantine explained that he believed it was not so much a matter of the princes being divided among themselves, as much as that each individual, within himself, was divided in his attitude toward the Turks. Constantine

^[27] Ibid.
and Dragutin were amazed to learn that West had not heard of their famous poem about the grey falcon which made illusion to this divided state of mind. The poem said that a grey falcon was sent from heaven to give Tsar Lazar the choice of having an earthly or heavenly kingdom. The Tsar chose a heavenly kingdom and built a great temple at Kossovo, as he had been instructed to do. He gave his soldiers the Eucharist and their battle orders, then fell in battle to the Turks. When they finished translating the poem for her, West, replied jokingly, "So that was what happened, Lazar was a member of the Peace Pledge Union." But while she joked a shudder ran through her as a pattern emerged in her mind that was deeply and disturbingly familiar to her. Lazar, she thought, had made the wrong choice. He saved his own soul while at the same time damning the souls of his countrymen for over five hundred years. But, she asked herself, do not certain individual rights take precedence over the rights of the state? What she concluded was that she did not believe it was possible to procure one's own salvation at the expense of condemning millions of people to slavery.

The black lamb and the grey falcon were working together. The battlefield at Kossovo and the rock at

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20 Ibid., 911.
Sheep's Field made consummate the tragedy of human history. The slaughter of the lamb was barbaric because it annulled the purpose of Christianity, which left mankind an equally horrid choice:

'Since it is wrong to be the priest and sacrifice the lamb, I will be the lamb and be sacrificed by the priest.' We thereby set up a principle that doom was honourable for innocent things, and we conceded that if we spoke of kindliness and recommended peace it was fitting that afterwards the knife should be passed across our throats. Therefore it happened again and again that when we fought well for a reasonable cause and were in sight of victory, we were filled with a sense that we were not acting according to a divine protocol, and turned away and sought defeat, thus betraying those who had trusted us to win them kindliness and peace. . . . Thus it was that the Slavs were defeated by the Turks on the field of Kossovo. 27

The Slavs, according to West knew instinctively that Christianity was better for mankind than Islam because, unlike Islam, it denounced the prime human fault, cruelty. But because "of the power of the rock over their minds, they could not go forward to victory." 30

Whatever one may think of West's conclusions, her thought processes are valid. Her sharp and thoughtful observation of experience adds credibility to her own attempt to find unity and purpose in the universe. Her willingness to draw personal application from her

27 Ibid., 915.
30 Ibid.
philosophic conclusions, may perhaps, make some uncom-
fortable. But West wrote, as she declared many times, to
understand what she knew and to learn what she should
know. Thus, the "power of the rock," and the message of
the falcon, took on a personal application, away from the
battlefield of Kossovo.

And I had sinned in the same way, I and my kind,
the liberals of Western Europe. We had regarded
ourselves as far holier than our tory opponents
because we had exchanged the role of priest for
the role of lamb, and therefore we forgot that we
were not performing the chief moral obligation of
humanity, which is to protect the works of
love. . . . It is possible that we have betrayed
life and love for more than five hundred years on
a field wider than Kossovo, as wide as Europe. As
I perceived it I felt again that imbecile anxiety
concerning my own behaviour in such a crisis,
which is a matter of only the slightest importance.
What mattered was that I had not served life faith-
fully, that I had been too anxious for a fictitious
personal salvation, and imbecile enough to conceive
that I might secure it by hanging around a stinking
rock where a man with dirty hands shed blood for no
reason. 31

West's personal observations in this regard would
not be merely idle. In the late 1930s England seemed
content with its role as sacrificial lamb. West con-
tinued to argue vehemently against pacifism and against
passivity to Nazi Germany. In the epilogue she referred
to the stillness covering England. "It would have been
expected, with fascist Italy and Nazi Germany crying out
to kill, and England being what they both needed to

31Ibid.
kill, that there would be much bustling to and fro on the building of defenses, that there would be shouts of warning, proclamations, calls to arms, debates on strategy. But there was silence, and no movement."

West had no appetite for playing the role of the black lamb, and she wished no part of England to be marred with its own Kossovo.

The journey from Old Serbia into Montenegro, which borders Albania, was to prove again the power of the black lamb and the grey falcon. Just as the large Bulgarian population in Macedonia had turned their loyalties away from Yugoslavia towards the east, so the Albanian population in Montenegro had turned south to Albania and west to Italy. Albania’s Italian connection was a cause of great concern to Constantine who knew well that Italy would use Albania as the launching point to occupy Dalmatia and Croatia, at least. In fact, during their journey throughout Montenegro they saw disturbing evidence that Italy was preparing to move forward with plans to control the Balkans. Constantine learned that Albanian officials bought by Italian money, had massacred four hundred so-called communists, people who would certainly have opposed Italian aggression into their country. Although there is a long epilogue, the

\[\text{\cite{ibid., 1115.}}\]
main text of the book ends mournfully with a remark by Constantine, who has just learned of events in Albania. He cried, "It is all nasty, so nasty, and it will not stop till the end." 33

Henry and Rebecca, at this point, prepared to board the boat at Kotor and began their trip back to England. It would prove to be a final departure from their friend Constantine. As he said, "It will not stop till the end," and indeed it did not. When the Second World War broke out, Henry and Rebecca offered him asylum in England, but he refused preferring to stay in Yugoslavia. Constantine (Stanislav Vinaver) ended up a prisoner of war in Germany. Rebecca sent him aid packages through the Red Cross, but they did not meet again. 34

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon achieves a powerful climax, although an undesired one, because publication of the book coincided with the Nazi destruction of Yugoslavia. In fact, the book is dedicated "To my friends in Yugoslavia, who are all now dead or enslaved." 35 West's final conclusions sit comfortably with the preceding one thousand pages. Man is divided, in love with life and with death, he must with

33 Ibid., 1070.
34 Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 156.
35 Ibid., 111.
Proceed conscious of his nature and determined to live.

Many critics of West have interpreted her as aligning herself with a pessimistic view of man which culminates in his consummate worthlessness and evil. But her remarks in this vein are nothing, to a realist, if not hopeful.

Again and again peoples have had the chance to live and show what would happen if human life were irrigated by continual happiness; and they have preferred to blow up the canals and perish of drought. They listen to the evil counsel of the grey falcon. They let their throats be cut as if they were black lambs. The mystery of Kossovo was behind this hill. It is behind all our lives.  

The hope lies in the ability of the will to change.

Destiny only charts a path it does not force one to take it. West met a peasant woman in Montenegro whose life had been a series of tragedies connected with the Yugoslavian tragedy. She was walking on the highest mountain, closest to God, questioning her lot. Here was the evidence that confirmed what West had written in fictional form long ago: that humans are a thinking reed. "If during the next million generations there is but one human being born in every generation who will not cease to inquire into the nature of his fate, even while

Ibid., 948.

West, The Thinking Reed, iv.
it strips and bludgeons him, some day we shall read the riddle of the universe."^{38}

West restated the purpose of her journey through Yugoslavia and the purpose of the book in the "Epilogue." Her aim, as a historian was to "show the past side by side with the present it created."^{39} As a concerned citizen, in a description not quite apt, she stated, "So I resolved to put on paper what a typical Englishwoman felt and thought in the late nineteen-thirties when, already convinced of the inevitability of the second Anglo-German war, she had been able to follow the dark waters of that event back to its source."^{40} West believed strongly in the validity of English civilization. She criticized its imperial failures because those efforts appeared to her to come from counsel given by the grey falcon. She criticized because she wanted to see the best in English civilization continue. "I know that the English are as unhealthy as lepers compared with perfect health. . . . But they are on the side of life, they love justice, they hate violence, and they respect the truth.\\n
^{38}Ibid., 1013.
^{39}Ibid., 1089.
^{40}Ibid., 1089.
This measure of wisdom makes it right that my civiliza-
tion should not perish."

For these reasons West lived in an agony of sorts
during the late 1930s, knowing beyond doubt that Germany,
under Hitler, would fulfill his "demonic" impulses. It is
interesting, and again indicative of the unity of West's
thought, that she would see in Hitler's actions the
culmination of pre-war Austria. Hitler was, after all,
Austrian and not German. The Austrian empire and the
Hapsburg monarchy had been responsible for some terrible
episodes in history, as West's book showed, but none more
terrible than events wrought by Hitler and his like.
Meanwhile, England was working out her destiny with
passivity. "The instrument of our suicidal impetus, [was]
Neville Chamberlain..." West commented that one of
the strongest signs of England's ill health was her
policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War. In
fact, in 1937, West contributed to a questionnaire
published in the Left Review arguing in favor of supply-
ing aid to Spaniards fighting Fascism."

England, she stated, regained her senses when Winston
Churchill came to power. West's relationship with

"Ibid., 1060-61.

"Ibid., 1125.

"West, "Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War," 27.
Churchill was one of extreme ambivalence. She, of course, was his enemy during the early part of the century when Churchill fought against votes for women. At the end of the Second World War, she would again find herself fighting Churchill, this time with regard to his decision to back Marshal Tito in Yugoslavia, whom she knew to be a communist. In 1949, when asked by Paul Palmer to contribute an article on Churchill, she replied in a letter "I admit that I owe my life to Winston Churchill, but there is nobody to whom I would not rather owe this particular debt. And I do not think I could write an article on him which you would like to publish." Nonetheless, during the war she well understood that she and many others owed their lives to Winston Churchill. In Black Lamb and Grey Falcon she said, "Now we were led by Winston Churchill, who cannot be imagined as wanting to die, though he would die if a more liberal allowance of life would be released by his death, if it were the necessary price to pay for the survival of his country. Thereafter all was easier."

And it was easier, in the sense that the courage of the English had been reborn, as they went through the

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"Rebecca West, North High Wycombe, to Paul Palmer, 21 September 1949, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

"West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, 1125."
process of repossessing their own wills. In the closing pages, West recounts the fall of France, Denmark, Belgium, Bulgaria and other nations under the Nazi war machine, as well as the brave resistance of the Greeks. After the Regent Prince Paul acquiesced to Hitler’s demands, the Yugoslavians forced him to abdicate. Why did they resist a force that was certain to cause their death? They were under no illusion, as other countries might have been, that their’s would be the victory.

The Yugoslavs, who have often been constrained to sin by history, are nevertheless well aware of the difference between good and evil. They know that a state that recognizes the obligation of justice and mercy, that is to say a state that forbids its citizens to indulge in the grosser forms of hatred and gives them the opportunity to live according to love, has more chance to survive in the world than a state based on the scurrying process of murder and rapine; and they know too that if a state based on love bows to the will of a state based on hatred without making the uttermost resistance it passes into the category of the other in the real world. Therefore they chose that Yugoslavia should be destroyed rather than submit to Germany and be secure, and made that choice for love of life, and not love of death.**

In Marseille, when it was learned that Hitler had been defied by Yugoslavia, "people picked flowers from their gardens and others ordered wreaths from their florists." The police knew what they were about to do and would not let them pass on the street. So they boarded street

**Ibid., 1145.
cars, and as they passed the street car drivers slowed so that the people were able to throw down their flowers on the spot where King Alexander of Yugoslavia had been murdered.

The climax of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is a dramatic one, as indeed were the events that inspired it. Drama notwithstanding, West, throughout the work, went to great lengths to insure the accuracy of the historical facts she used. Despite her efforts, however, she had available to her, at the time of writing, only official sources. The result of this limitation was that she did not have all the facts. Many years latter, in 1980, in a letter to her attorney, she questioned how she could possibly be expected "to know what was going on [in 1941] except through the Foreign Office? Who do they think suggested I wrote a final chapter to my book except the Ministry of Information?"

West wrote this letter in response to pressure put upon her by those who were supporters of Prince Paul, whom West treated as sympathetic to the Nazis, when they learned that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* would be reissued in 1982. The suggestion in the letter that she had, perhaps, been used by the Foreign Office for propaganda purposes, sounds more

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like an attempt, forty years after the fact, to be left alone by her critics, than it does an honest belief on her part or of the facts. It is true that much of West's information, while writing the "Epilogue," came from official sources inside the government, but West, then as later, wrote and held positions that were discouraged by the Foreign Office. She was naturally disadvantaged by the fact that her writing was contemporaneous with the events of which she wrote. That many facts were not available to her did lead, in some instances, to inaccurate conclusions. Interestingly though, West, when she had the opportunity forty years later to revise the work in the light of more recent scholarship and the more complete disclosure of the facts, chose not to change a word of Black Lamb and Grey Falcon when it was reissued. Also, it should be noted that there is a vein in current Balkan scholarship that supports West's most disputed claims that Mihailovic was not a fascist (though it is now known that he did attempt to make a deal with the Nazis, as did Tito), and that Prince Paul was a Nazi
sympathizer. To be sure, the information she possessed was incomplete. Though even with the advantage of hindsight and available archives, modern scholars continue to disagree about the facts.

With regard to the ancient history with which West dealt, she was careful to relay accurate information. In a letter to Professor R.W. Seton-Watson she took to task a man he had recommended to her, William Miller, an historian who wrote an article in the Cambridge Medieval History about King Milutin of Nemanyas. West’s history of Milutin and his family appear in the chapter about Old Serbia, and include some substantive differences from the article published in the Cambridge Medieval History, slightly before the release of Black Lamb and Grey Falcon.

West said that nothing in her life had affected her more deeply than her journey through Yugoslavia, which

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**When Black Lamb and Grey Falcon was reissued in 1982, West received a letter from the younger brother of King Peter who had assumed the throne, though in exile, upon the forced abdication of Prince Paul. Prince Androj, supported West’s position that Paul was “well impressed with Hitler as a man and spoke so glowingly of him.” He relayed to West also that his mother had told him that Prince Paul had been shaken and frightened by Hitler’s power. Prince Androj, to Rebecca West, London, 16 March 1982, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

**Rebecca West, to R.W. Seton-Watson, 24 January 1939, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
subsequent events certainly proved. During and after the war she found herself involved with the Yugoslavian government-in-exile in London. Mainly through the efforts of her friend, Milan Gavrilovic, Minister of Justice in the exiled government, West went to considerable lengths to influence British opinion, anywhere she could, towards adopting a policy that recognized the legitimacy of the government-in-exile rather than Tito, whom she knew, as did Churchill, to have connections with the Soviet Union. In fact, West received a letter, dated 26 December 1944, from the Secretary General of the Croat Peasant Party, Dr. Jurajkrmjevic, "begging" her to send a copy of the letter to the "Right Honourable Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, in connection with the Yugoslav situation." She apparently did. West’s files on Yugoslavia contain confidential military reports regarding the Partisan Nationalist Forces, addresses by members of Parliament, copies of documents from the exiled government and King Peter’s speeches to his countrymen, and a sundry of other items. In 1943, West began to realize that official British foreign policy was then beginning to favor Tito and his National Liberation

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50 In the Rebecca West Collection at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, boxes 56 and 57 contain West’s information on Yugoslavia and the Mihailovic question.
Army. Because Tito was a known communist and because she had heard many good things about Mihailovic's anti-Nazi stance while visiting the military College at Nish while in Yugoslavia, she was naturally disturbed by the British governments shift in attitude.\footnote{Rebecca West, "To the Editor: 'The Embattled Mountain,'" \textit{Times Literary Supplement}, 21 April 1972, 448.}

As well, West appears to have been influenced by her association with the Yugoslav government-in-exile. Her information, which was more prolific than most private individuals received, came from both the Foreign Office, the exiled government, as well as, from sources she had cultivated while in Yugoslavia. While all those in the exiled government were anti-communist, West may have been mislead in thinking that they were all monarchial liberals similar to those in Britain. But whatever the political opinions of the exiled government, the tragedy for Yugoslavia of the Allied support of Tito is not lessened. However, West's unwillingness to change her opinions regarding Yugoslavian matters, in the light of new information made available by the passing years, may stem, in part, from her sense of loyalty to those whom she knew during and after the war. And not only loyalty, but West simply did not feel that there was enough evidence, from unbiased sources, to conclude, for
example, that Mihailovic was a traitor, or that Prince Paul did not demonstrated sympathy with the Nazis by his failure to rally and prepare his countrymen properly for the events that would inevitably ensue. Her running battles with those who published new works on the topics of Mihailovic and Prince Paul, through letters in *The Spectator* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, indicate that as a matter of intellectual choice and emotional loyalty she did not see irrefutable evidence that would force a change of opinion.

In 1943 West wrote a story intended for the *Time and Tide* called "Madame Sara’s Magic Crystal: Marshal Pierrot." The story was a satire that envisioned a communist dictator named Marshal Pierrot taking control of France with the help and recognition of democratic England. As she no doubt intended, the parallel to Marshal Tito was thinly veiled. Within the story she

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**52**It now appears the Prince Paul was successful in gaining from Hitler some concessions regarding Yugoslavian sovereignty in the process of signing the agreement with him. Although, these concessions amounted to nothing, as Hitler was hardly a man of his word. Cecil Parrott, "To the Editor: Prince Paul of Yugoslavia," *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 January 1981, 11.

summed up what she suspected to be taking place between Britain and Tito.

For the recognition of Marshal Pierrot was a Right Wing stunt from first to last. We might have told the truth about him. We might have owned up that their was a civil war in France, and that the revolutionaries were led by a man called Marshal Pierrot, and that the others who wanted to live in the same sort of society as ours were fighting against him, and that there were good people on both sides, and that probably the best man would win, and any way it was France's business. Instead we played him up as if all conceivable kinds of right were on his side and all conceivable kinds of wrong on the other side. It was some of our Right Wing boys who got that idea and worked it out to the last detail. But not only did the Left Wing intellectuals not offer any opposition to the policy, though it was dead against half their principles, they swallowed it hook, line, and sinker, and even took on the job of selling it to the public. There wasn't any question of leading them up the garden path. They ran up it of their own accord. . . .

In a letter to her friend, Phillip Guedalla, Rebecca mentioned the story,

I assumed we were allowing Russia to set up a communist government in Yugoslavia. . . . This seemed to me pretty silly and criminal. . . . so I wrote a piece about it for Time and Tide, a satire called "Marshal Pierrot". . . . in view of the appalling way it read Margaret Rhondda and I agreed not to publish it and I took it to Sir Orme Sargent. . . . and said 'Look here, I am not publishing this, because I think it may be against public policy.'

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[^5]: Rebecca West, to Phillip Geudalla, undated (circa 1943-44), Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
West had apparently been informed that the story was a violation, during wartime, of public policy and refrained from publishing it. In a diary entry for 1943-44 she mentioned a meeting with Sargent at Buckingham Palace where she assured him that she would "sacrifice myself to the needs of the country."[5]

West justified her decision on the basis of military necessity and patriotism, causes she did not take lightly. Sargent had persuaded her that the recognition of Tito was based on "military necessity and no other reason."[6] The story was never published and has received little or no attention. It remains true, however, the "Marshal Pierrot" is a remarkable piece of prescience. It grieved West all her life that Britain abandoned Mihailovic and the Chetniks who, she believed, not only fought the Nazis with distinction but fought with the same ideological motives as the Allies. Again, within the text of the story, West's confusion about this "travesty" is manifest. "They did not think Great Britain and America would make it a condition of helping them that they would submit to a form of government to which Great Britain and

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[5] Rebecca West, Diary/Memorandum, 1942/1944, Box 23, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

[6] Ibid.
America themselves do not submit."

Following the war, West did all she could to see to it that England became a haven for those Yugoslavs unwilling to remain in a communist Yugoslavia. In fact, in 1948, she wrote to Churchill asking him to match her own contribution, to aid in the plight of the Yugoslavian refugees. On the draft copy of the letter, kept in her files, she made the note, "The old meanie didn't send me a farthing, though he was then rolling in money." In 1946 she wrote the preface for a work published for the benefit of the Yugoslav Relief Society, called Diversion. In the same year she wrote the preface for Beyond The Urals, published by the British League for European Freedom. This work written by Elma Dangerfield was an account of Russian atrocities in Poland during the war, and the continuing enslavement of the Polish people under communist tyranny.

In the same year, 1946, West involved herself in the debate concerning the Allied decision to side with Tito over Mihailovic. West believed that there were communists in critical foreign policy posts who insured that Britain would adopt such a policy. In one of her more

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"Rebecca West, North High Wycombe, to Winston Churchill, 29 August 1948, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa."
eccentric allegations, she accused Lord Beaverbrook, whom she knew well, of influencing Churchill in favor of a policy that would appease the Soviet Union in this matter and others.60 West never believed that Mihailovic collaborated with the Germans, (although about this she was wrong), or was a traitor. While the historical debate on this matter rages on to this day, it seems clear that probably both Tito and Mihailovic, at some point in time and for various reasons, spoke with the Nazis. What made West most suspicious in the 1940s and 1950s about the information regarding Mihailovic’s political beliefs, which West always contended were liberal, was the source of the information. Glendinning records, and West makes reference to the fact in a letter to the editor of The Spectator in 1952, that it was Guy Burgess who told her in a London restaurant that Mihailovic was a traitor.61 Indeed, time has borne out that a great deal of the information that reached Churchill and the public was manufactured in the Cairo office of the Special Operations Executive, where many of the staffers were either sympathetic to communism or

60 Rebecca West, to Mr. Lawrence, 3 August 1954, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

communists themselves. It should be remembered that Soviet Russia was an ally at this time. Thus, aiding an ally could not be considered inappropriate or treasonous. However, it is now known that the communist James Klugman and other left-wing sympathizers in the Cairo branch of the SOE, did sabotage Mihailovic by losing or delaying his messages that requested arms. "One SOE liaison officer with Mihailovic claimed in 1983 that SOE headquarters in Cairo had been 'a heap of Soviet moles.'" Churchill, however, did not rely completely on the SOE in this case. He sent Tory MP, Fitzroy Maclean to Yugoslavia to assess the resistance movements, who were also engaged in a civil war against each other. Maclean told Churchill that Tito would win, but that Yugoslavia would then become communist.

West, it turns out was partly correct and partly incorrect in her perceptions with regard to this episode. In her assurance that Tito would plunge the country into totalitarianism, she was not wrong. He did betray the monarchy, as he said he would not do, and left the country with very little choice as to who would lead

**2Basil Davidson, "Scenes From the Anti-Nazi War," New Statesman, 4 July 1980, 11.**

them. While Tito, himself, proved to be less a puppet to Stalin than West predicted, she was correct that a British and American policy that favored Tito would place Yugoslavia within the Soviet orbit.

In the *Time and Tide* she wrote a defense of Mihailovic called "The Record of General Mihailovic,"* As well, she wrote the preface for David Martin's *Ally Betrayed: The Uncensored Story of Tito and Mihailovich*. In that preface West stated, "I am a Socialist. But I have to admit that in the last few years the Left Wing has shown itself just about as good a custodian of the sacred principle of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality, as the watchdog who was found holding a lamp in his mouth for the burglar who was cracking the safe."*6

When Mihailovic was put on trial in Tito's puppet court, West again, and against popular opinion, spoke out in his defense. In a letter dated 30 August 1946, West replied to a letter she had received thanking her for signing the appeal for Mihailovic in *The Times*. "It was kind indeed of you to thank me for my signature to the appeal in *The Times*, but that indeed was a very little


thing to do for an English person who must have such a heavy burden on her conscience in this matter. I can only beg your pardon and the pardon of all Yugoslavs for the great injuries that my people have inflicted on your people." "Rebecca received many letters from grateful Yugoslans for her efforts on their behalf or for her efforts in general. One typical letter dated, 20 December 1948, stated, "In the most difficult days when we were behind the Allied barbed wire, you were our best friend. We will never forget it. Our friends are in our hearts. Today as free workers in Great Britain we very often remember you and we send you our best greetings. [signed] Serbian peasants, Mihailovic's Chetnik E.V.W.S. in Great Britain." "West remained committed to Yugoslavia all of her life, as well as to individual Yugoslans. Her involvement, in this case, was not merely theoretical. The time and money Henry and Rebecca gave to the Gavrilovic family alone, constituted enormous generosity. When Milan Gavrilovic died in Washington D.C. on 1 January 1976, his children asked Rebecca to write a word about their father.

"Rebecca West, North High Wycombe, to Mr. Djonovitch, London, 30 August 1946, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

"Serbian peasants," to Rebecca West, 20 December 1948, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
for any publication she chose. (Incidently West’s words are inscribed on his tombstone in their entirety.)

Though she was ill herself at the time, she wrote a short obituary that was picked up by many of the major newspapers. What she said about her friend, Milan, could also be used to express her feelings about the country of his birth.

Milan Gavrilovic was one of the wise men of modern Europe and his wisdom was rejected and what that rejection has cost us can be seen in our present miseries. But he himself kept all of the virtues the rest of the world cast aside and in possession of that treasure he was rich in exile. All those with whom he shared his spiritual and intellectual riches will never cease to feel love and gratitude. He was the very image of the day we threw away when we decided to stay in the night.

CHAPTER IX

"SURRENDERING THE HEAVY BURDEN OF FREEDOM"
TREASON IN THE 20TH CENTURY

One could not think of a topic more suitable for Rebecca West to take up than that of treason. There is almost nothing that she wrote that did not in some way hint at the phenomenon of betrayal or treason. This was so because West believed that, at the simplest level, man betrayed himself on a regular basis by making choices that sabotaged his own well-being. In Black Lamb and Grey Falcon she said, "There is nothing rarer than a man who can be trusted never to throw away happiness, however eagerly he sometimes grasps it."

Since treachery existed at the individual level, and was made abundantly manifest throughout history, West was not surprised to find an increasing amount of treachery on larger scales. But why in the twentieth century had men come together by the millions for the purpose of doing injury to those institutions that had sustained them? This question, to West, was not only one of intellectual interest. The question embodied the larger issue of the

1West, Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, 1102.
existence of an absolute. She accepted intellectually, as part of her premise about treason, that there did exist a unity or a set of absolutes that gave existence and its particulars their meaning. While West accepted this as the basis of her argument against the betrayal of one's country, which in some way embodied in its institutions the ideal of the absolute, she struggled personally to come to terms with the exact nature of such a concept.

In its cover story on Rebecca West, *Time* magazine stated that the idea to report the post-war trials of British traitors was her own. The memorable copy that she produced, which made up large portions of the first two chapters of *The Meaning of Treason*, was first published in *The New Yorker*, for her favorite editor and friend Harold Ross. The epilogue was originally published in *Harper's Magazine*. West became deeply engrossed in this project and worked obsessively on it.

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In her diary she records her frantic progress and the negative toll her efforts were having on her marriage. The Meaning of Treason was published in the United States in 1947 and in Great Britain, with some small revisions, in 1949. She sat through each court session of the trials she reported on. She stood, in the rain, outside the prison in which William Joyce was hanged in order to watch the posting of the announcement that informed the public he had been pronounced dead. West interviewed family, friends, and neighbors, as well as visiting the neighborhoods of those accused. She sank herself into this new project because she felt deeply that the men who were being tried by their peers for plotting their death were not so different from the vast majority who condemned them. Though they deserved condemnation, they also deserved explanation. When asked in 1953 in a B.B.C. radio program, if she could envision herself ever becoming a spy, she replied, "Of course, that's why I'm interested in them."

Part of the brilliance of West's analysis has less to do with her conclusions and more to do with her methods.

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3Rebecca West, Diary Entries, 9 January, 10 January, 16 January 1947, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

She was a first-class journalist who was able to bring the sometimes boring courtroom procedure to life. *Time* magazine said, "Most reporters report in one dimension, achieving at best the dramatic surface of a mural or a movie. Rebecca West reports in depth—a depth whose winding recess of character, situation, or context she divines by the play of unusually good instincts and intuitions guided by an eye for significant detail. . . . She is one of the greatest of living journalists." Kenneth Tynan in *Persona Grata* (1953) voiced a typical attitude: "Rebecca West is still the best journalist alive, the only one who can record both the facts and their flavour without loss of grace or vigour." One of the reasons she achieved such high marks for her reporting of this emotion-filled subject, was her ability to combine compassion with tough-minded realism. One reviewer said, "The ability to re-create another's thoughts sympathetically without surrendering the right to judge him sternly involves an extraordinary capacity for detachment." She received the

7"Circles of Perdition," 108.


Women's National Press Club's Award for Journalism, presented by President Truman who called her "the world's best reporter." West used the medium of biography when she could, thereby humanizing the reporting. The effect is that of reading a chilling mystery mixed with the uncomfortable sense of reality.

West recognized that treason had always existed. She could readily admit that some individuals were traitors out of no ideological motive or fanatical commitment, but rather sought no more than personal gain. These factors being true, however, did not explain the abundance of treason in modern history. As with most else, West viewed modern treason as illustrative of the moral, spiritual, and political bankruptcy effecting all of Europe. She used the person of William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw) as a means of summing up one very large and frightening element within modern society. Two-thirds of The Meaning of Treason is an attempt to understand the person of William Joyce as he personified the madness he and millions of others were dedicated to.

No one denied that William Joyce had committed treason. He had placed himself at the disposal of his adopted Nazi family, after leaving England. They asked

10 West, "This I Believe," quoted in the Introduction. 188.
that he broadcast back to his countrymen every night a message of doom intended to sap their strength and defeat their will. When he uttered the words "not guilty" at London's Central Criminal Court his treachery was complete.

Never before have people known the voice of one they had never seen as well as if he had been a husband or a brother or a close friend; and if they had seen such a miracle they would not have imagined that the familiar unknown would speak to them only to prophesy their death or ruin. All of us in England had experienced that hideous novelty. It was difficult not to chance on Joyce's wavelength when one was tuning in to the English stations, and there was an arresting quality about his voice that made it a sacrifice not to go on listening. . . . It seemed as if one had better harken and take warning when he suggested that the destiny of the people he had left in England was death, and the destiny of his new masters in Germany life and conquest, and that, therefore, his listeners had better change sides and submit. This was often terrible to hear, because the news in the papers confirmed it. He always spoke as if he were better fed and better clothed than we were, and so, we now know, he was. He went further than smug mockery of our plight. He sinned that sin which is the dark travesty of legitimate hatred because it is felt for kindred, just as incest is the dark travesty of legitimate love.11

While the proof of his activities was irrefutable, the technicalities of Joyce's case introduced the bizarre into the proceedings. Joyce, it turned out, was born in the United States to an Irish father and an English mother. His father had become a naturalized American

citizen, but went back to Ireland at the outbreak of the First World War. His American citizenship greatly inconvenienced him there, because he was required to register under the Alien’s Act. For whatever reason, Michael Joyce instructed his sons not to speak of their American citizenship and he, himself, destroyed the documentation to that effect. The Joyces sided with the British in their struggle with the Irish and fought against the Sinn Fein. As a sixteen year old, applying for entrance to the London University Officers' Training Corps, Joyce wrote: "I am in no way connected with the United States of America, against which, as against all other nations, I am prepared to draw the sword in British interests. As a young man of pure British decent, . . . I have always been desirous of devoting what little capability and energy I have to the country which I love so dearly." Nevertheless, William Joyce was an American citizen and not a subject of the Crown. The case against him depended, of course, on his British nationality. To complicate matters further, Joyce had applied for, and been granted, German citizenship on 26 September 1940, before the United States and Germany were at war. If Joyce had told the truth about his American citizenship he would not be in the dock, for he had

12Ibid., 10.
been in Germany until 26 September 1940, working as an American for a friendly state and after that he had been a German working for the Fatherland. Therefore, "it followed then that his broadcasting was, if only his nationality had to be considered, an offence against nobody." But society could not maintain its moral authority, according to West, if the law became trivialized in such a manner.

Joyce would have walked out of the London court "scot free if society had been conducted on lines as arbitrary as imagined by those who are Fascist." That is, by those who do not understand that government must be run by the rule of law, on a contractual basis. Allegiance is a reciprocal process, wherein the state provides protection to those within its confines, and exacts from them obedience to the laws. In a brief historical survey on the "tradition and logic" of allegiance, West quotes Sir Edward Coke, who said, protection draws allegiance, and allegiance draws protection. Those who live within the jurisdiction of a given nation and have been granted protection under the laws, owe allegiance to that country, despite the accident of their birth. "There could be no doubt

13 Ibid., 22.

14 Ibid.
whatsoever that William Joyce owed this kind of allegiance." The epigraph West chose, from Acts of the Apostles, becomes clear when one considers this argument. "For he was numbered among us, and had obtained part of this ministry," but was destroyed because for money he had exchanged his hope of salvation."

The argument of Joyce's attorneys, who were technically correct, was disturbing because it could create a legal situation wherein the "game becomes less important than the rules." Although Joyce had on many occasions denounced any connection to the United States, had traveled under a British passport, and had always considered himself an Englishman, it was possible for him to save his life by embracing the thing he had always denied and hidden: his American citizenship. West carefully observed Joyce throughout the trial and received the impression that while Joyce enjoyed following the legal intricacies of this argument, he believed it all to be nonsense. He knew he owed allegiance to the Crown, and when the judge ruled that a person holding a British passport, whether residing inside or outside the

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1=Ibid., 23.
2=Ibid., 26.
3=Ibid., 111.
realm, owed allegiance to the Crown, he knew he would die as a result of it.

It must be understood that West did not perceive Joyce's conviction as a perversion of the letter of the law in order to fulfill its intent. It is doubtful, given her life-long emphasis on the law as a moral force and on individual liberty, that she could have taken a position of this nature had she believed that the law was being trampled in order that the Crown have the right to take the life of William Joyce. (In fact, West was never convinced of the correctness of capital punishment.) She believed that within the history of jurisprudence, there existed substantial precedent upon which to tie Joyce's allegiance to the British Crown, thus, providing legitimate grounds to base a case against him. Later in "Greenhouse With Cyclamens I" she stated unequivocally that it was better to let a guilty man go free than to twist the law even slightly so that a conviction might be obtained.\footnote{Rebecca West, "Greenhouse With Cyclamens I (1946)," in A Train of Powder (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), 57.} Further, in her most autobiographical novel, The Fountain Overflows (1956) West created a situation wherein a woman connected with the central characters was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang. She was clearly guilty of the crime, but did not receive a fair
trial because the judge behaved unreasonably. The father
of the Aubrey family, a character quite similar to West's
own father, went to considerable lengths to see that this
murderess was reprieved. Because, if "... Queenie
Phillips is hanged she will be the victim of a judicial
murder, for what happened in the Central Criminal Court
when she stood in the dock was not a trial." Thus, it
may be assumed, that West believed that the letter and
the spirit of the law were being upheld fairly with
regard to the conviction of William Joyce. In the case
of Joyce, the letter of the law was merely struggling to
keep pace with a rapidly changing society.

In point of legal fact, Joyce was charged under the
Treason Act of 1351. In 1916 Sir Roger Casement had been
tried under the same law, and the court had determined
that Casement, an Irishman who attempted to raise an
anti-British Irish force in Germany, did owe allegiance
under the Treason Act whether inside or outside of the
realm. The point to be determined in Joyce's case was
whether the law could cover the acts of an alien in a
foreign land, who held a British passport, and whose
ethnic nationality and residence had been within the
realm. Joyce was charged with high treason for having
broadcast for the enemy. These charges were divided into

"West, The Fountain Overflows, 214."
two counts, the first covering the date of his contract with German radio until his capture in 1945 and the other from the date of his contract until the expiration of his British passport. When it was proven that Joyce was not a British national by virtue of his birth, the first count against him was dismissed. The question remained, of course, whether possession of a British passport, which the prosecution argued provided the bearer protection, also commanded allegiance. The judge ruled that "beyond a shadow of a doubt," Joyce owed allegiance to the Crown. The ruling was upheld in the Court of Appeals.

The British public, who lacked information about the trial because available newspaper print was limited, came to the conclusion, according to West, that while Joyce was a "vile man he should not have been hanged." He was after all an American. But West believed that the opposite of mercy was at work in such an attitude. They should have said that Joyce was not a vile man but that he deserved to be hanged. "They had cast their eyes on a conception of the law with a new and dishonourable intent." West saw in this attitude a notion that

21 Ibid., 62.
ran counter to the maintenance of justice, for this reason:

Pagan and Christian alike realized that the law should be at once the recognition of an eternal truth and the solution by a community of one of its temporal problems; for both conceived that the divine will was mirrored in nature, which man could study by use of his reason. This is the faith that has kept jurisprudence an honest and potent exercise throughout the ages, and still keeps it so, though the decline in religion has made many find other names for what is written in nature and has to be deciphered by such men as wish to be good: such as the service of humanity, the rights of the state, the sovereignty of intelligence or moral sense.\(^\text{22}\)

Those who wished Joyce to be pardoned implicitly wished the law to be purely arbitrary. For the law is always running to catch up with human experience and such men are always able to trample the spirit of the law without having broken the letter of the law. These lapses can be exploited happily only by those who reject the sacredness of the rule of law, because justice is deposed as the primary principle. As West said later in an interview at Yale University, the result of a breakdown of law led inevitably, in its extreme, to Mussolini and Hitler.

"Life became very uncomfortable because the law wasn't respected. We began to learn that the law was no luxury, it was a necessity."\(^\text{23}\) In an interesting sidelight, West learned at the end of the war, though she made only an

\(^\text{22}\)Ibid., 62-63.

\(^\text{23}\)"Yale Reports" on WTIC radio, 13 May 1956, Transcript no. 28, Yale University, New Haven CT.
ambiguous reference to it in the text, that her name had been on the Gestapo list of those who were to be immediately arrested when the Germans invaded England.  

Indeed, "the public who cried out that William Joyce should not have been hanged wanted the perverse satisfaction of seeing a man whose crime it knew by testimony of its own ears go unpunished, thus being assured that life was moral nonsense." Such a position demanded that man be viewed as a moveable piece in a game, where he struggles to outsmart the rules, thus proving the game worthless. A man is not seen for what he is: lovable or unlovable, but for how he plays. In William Joyce, West contended, there was much to be loved. This was her introduction to the man whose hanging she had just argued in favor of. Her research into Joyce's life, which became the biography of him in the chapter titled "The Revolutionary," produced in her a great deal of sympathy for Joyce. Her dislike of him was not personal or mean. In a letter to Cyril Connolly she confessed: "I am consumed with pity for Joyce because it seems to me that he lived in a true hell: to have enough brains to discern that there was such a thing as political science.

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24In 1971, she received a letter from P. Elizig, inviting her to attend a "Dinner of the Doomed" in honor of all those who had been on the Gestpo's Black List. P. Elizig, to Rebecca West, 1971, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

and to be inflamed with a passionate desire to be the instrument of political wisdom and to be such a fool that all you could work up was a peculiarly idiotic variety of anti-semitism: ... There couldn't be anything worse."

Intergmingled with the biography of Joyce, are the stories of other English traitors to Nazi Germany. Among them Norman Baillie-Stewart, Francis Dale, John Amery, Herbert George, Denis John, Eric Reginald, Thomas Haller Cooper, and Dr. Alan Nunn May. West was able to tell the story of treachery in the twentieth century using Joyce as the focal point, while using the others to emphasize one aspect or another of this phenomenon.

She called Joyce a revolutionary because he set his hand to the destruction of the system. "He wants to overthrow the order that exists and which may be the only order capable of existing. But he risks the annihilation of all order only because he believes he can evade that disaster and can substitute for the existing order another which he believes to be superior." Unfortunately, history demonstrated that most of the creative energy in revolutions was poured out in the destruction of the existing system, leaving very little to create the

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24 Rebecca West, to Cyril Connolly, 1 November 1964, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

27 West, The Meaning of Treason, 113.
new order. West said truly, "the French Revolution has given pleasure to all subsequent generations because it was an outstanding event which afterwards proved never to have happened." By this she meant that the old order did nothing more than give way to a new version of itself. The old emperor was replaced by a new, self-crowned emperor, and the last to die by the guillotine were those who had constructed it. In Russia the destruction was greater and the results more negligible. William Joyce set his hand to the Nazi revolution, "which, with an infinitely greater expenditure of blood than either France or Russia had seen, was to tear down Europe and leave it in ruins. . . ." The system Joyce and his like created was a non-system, for it reviled against the idea of contract, which stems from the law. There was not, nor could there be, any substance to Hitler's Germany because no society or government, capitalist, communist, or socialist could survive "for ten minutes if it abandons the principle that a contract is sacred." It maintained that legitimate power must be taken by force and not by the "force of love." The crime here was perhaps the ultimate because it denied the

28Ibid.
29Ibid., 114.
30Ibid., 202.
free wills of those it sought to control. All people became little more than players in the mad struggle to destroy the system that imposed the rules. For these reasons, "treason is inherent in fascism." The destruction of all things meaningful to the soil from which these men sprung was not limited to old ideas or institutions. With William Joyce, the hatred of England, which he could neither control nor fit into, became so great that he continued to glory in the air bombardment of London after the Luftwaffe had blown his father and mother's house to bits.

West asked the question as to why men such as these feel the need to stand on a political platform. Her answer, which she admitted was conjecture, held that there seemed to be a need in man for the type of relationship that many find in the idea of a personal God. Those who have rid themselves of the notion of the existence of God, nevertheless, desire such a relationship of complete acceptance. They look for it in the field farthest removed from the arena of personal relationships, politics. Party politics then become religious dogma, and the political leader promises devotion, faithful service, unconditional love for their people, and prophesies greatness for them. "Therefore the man who would have

\[ \text{Ibid., 191.} \]
been happy in the practice of religion during the ages of faith has in these modern times a need for participation in politics which is strong as the need for food, shelter, for sex."

West, in no way, intended to equate followers of religion with followers of mad god-men. Her emphasis was on the universality of the need for complete acceptance and the desire at times to abandon one’s self to a power greater than one’s self. That arguably normal desire gone awry, was proof to her of the spiritual bankruptcy of modern life. Thus, she concluded the chapter on Joyce:

On the floor of the courts where William Joyce was tried there was tested an issue of how far the letter is divorced from the spirit; it was debated whether a man can live all his life among a tribe and eat their salt and in the hour of their danger sharpen the sword intended by their enemies for their breasts, and then go free because of something written in an old book which said that this man was not truly of that tribe. But in the upper air above these courts it was argued whether the God with whom man can have a personal relationship is the dream of disappointed sons imaging a Father who shall be better than all fathers, or is more real than reality. This other trial was not concluded, not being confined to time or space.33

This “other trial” was the trial West’s writing was about.

What may be said about William Joyce, that he was all he wanted to be, that he chose and became his dream,

32Ibid., 193.

33Ibid., 197.
could not be said of the other traitors dealt with in The Meaning of Treason. West explored the equally treasonous, but certainly less deliberate, behavior of those she referred to as "the madmen and the children." John Amery, the delinquent son of "a deeply respected family," had spent his life in pursuit activities destined put him at odds with society. His legal and financial problems had made it impossible for him to stay in England, so he left and went to Spain where he became a gun-runner for Franco. West said that the Spanish Civil War had not only taken from the labor movements in many countries its best young men, but that it "offered an asylum to certain persons who, if of no definite political faith, knew that they were failures, refused to recognize that they had failed from inability to achieve the average standard, and preferred to think that they were natural leaders who had been trodden down by their inferiors. These found new hope in Franco's fascism." When the World War broke out, Amery went to France where he made contact with the French fascists who put him in touch with the Germans. Amery worked for the Germans in two major ways. He broadcast back to England, not unlike Joyce, and went to prison camps where he sought to recruit young English captives to join the

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 216-17.
British Free Corps, a group that in reality did not exist, but was intended to fight the Bolsheviks. Most of these young men were then put in the position of becoming informants for the Nazis in the prisoner camps, or providing what English military information as they knew or could learn.

Though Amery's treachery was known, his family and attorneys had gone to great lengths to establish a defence for him that rested on his having become a Spanish citizen prior to the outbreak of the war. Despite the fact that Spanish lawyers had been brought from Spain, presumably to give evidence to that effect, when Amery was asked how he pleaded to the charges brought against him he replied, "I plead guilty to all counts." The court and judge were shocked for there was no option other than death for one who plead guilty to a capital crime. "In effect, the young man was saying, 'I insist on being hanged by the neck in three weeks' time, . . .'." West reported that this had a sickening effect on the court because it rejected the will to live that existed in everyone present. His will to die did not possess the spiritual quality that made death preferable to material existence.

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Amery was not mad, according to West, but he was not sane either, for the reason that he seemed incapable of engaging in behavior that would favor his own survival. Using her own definition, West classified Amery as psychotic. "Neurotics, who cause less distress to themselves and their neighbours than those in the other category, are at war with their own natures. Their right hands are in conflict with their left. Psychotics, and it is those who commit purposeless crimes and prefer death to life, are at war with their environment. Right and left hands strike against the womb that carries them."

Into this category also fell Norman Baillie-Stewart, a British Army officer, whose treasonous behavior appeared to stem from nothing more than his fascination with Germany and German women. Baillie-Stewart was most pitiable because the Germans, believing he was a British agent, treated him miserably. Following the war, the judge at his trial wanted nothing better than to send this man back to Germany permanently, so difficult was his crime to define or understand. Germany, however, would not take him so he went to an English jail.

The final chapter in The Meaning of Treason contains the analysis of West's reports at the courts martial of

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those young men who were seduced into committing treason by the likes of John Amery. "The Children" included Navy and Army personnel like Kenneth Edwards and Stoker Rose. Both were accused of collaborating with the enemy and Rose was accused, additionally, of passing military secrets to the Germans regarding radar installations in Portsmouth, his home. Portsmouth was bombed unmercifully during the war. Both were found guilty of correspondence with the enemy, but Rose was found innocent of transmitting military intelligence. These young men, Edwards was under twenty at the time of his court martial and Rose was twenty-three, and others became willing to breach the convictions that they believed in, in order to save their lives. They were most pitiable because they knew their offense and despised themselves for it.

The children who go from their homes with strangers because they have been given cakes and sweets are unsustained by pride when the unkindness falls on them. They know well they have done wrong. A person should be loyal to his father and mother, to his brothers and sisters, to his friends, to his town or village, to his province, to his country; and a person should do nothing for a bribe, even if it takes the form of a promise that he should live instead of die. This is the faith which such children hold: to which they feel they must be true, if they are to be saved, if they are to be loved, by others or by themselves.\textsuperscript{37}

In the long run, one of the more significant events to come out of the reporting of these courts martial was

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 296-97.
a reform of the system. West was shocked at times, during the trial, at the unprofessional way that the proceedings were run. They did not comply to the rules of law and evidence in the civil courts, nor did the defendant receive any warning about self incrimination. As well, punishments handed out by the courts martial were far harsher than that of the civil courts for comparable offenses. West, in an interview ten years after her reports of these trials, happily pointed to the fact that the courts martial had been significantly reformed since her reports were published. She said: "Actually people have reformed the courts martial in England very, very considerably. It's not such a barbaric institution as it was, and what I am prouder of is that it is the hardboiled officials who have largely done it, showing that an official can have a heart."^28

In a brief "Epilogue" to The Meaning of Treason, West placed into context the individual trials she had reported on. Treason was not new, nor was it more frequent than in previous periods in history. In the twentieth century, however, treason's roots came from the lack in society of a sense of spiritual process and rootedness. West had explained in considerable detail many times before her feeling that the industrialized

^28"Yale Reports" WTIC, no.28, 4.
world had effectively eliminated people from contact with the creative process. They lost any sense of understanding, not only of their newly manufactured goods, but also they lost contact with their neighbors, their families, and their country. This material philosophy, rooted in a "rational conception of life" left one disconnected with the very things that had given his life meaning.

Children were to grow up straight striplings of light, undeformed by repression, . . . because their parents would hand them over in their earliest years to the care of pedagogic experts. Divorce was not to be reckoned as a disgrace nor as a tragedy nor even as a failure, but as a pleasurable extension of experience, like travel. The ardours of patriotism were to be abandoned, and replaced by a cool resolution to place one's country on a level with all others in one's affections and to hand it over without concern to the dominion of any other power which could offer it greater material benefits. It was not out of cynicism that the benefits demanded were material; it was believed that the material automatically produced the intellectual and the spiritual.3

Life did not become sweeter or easier, however, as a result. According to West, a man should not be torn away from those things that give him life and sustain his life. A love for, or at least a deep connection to his country, his home, and his family, rendered a man better able to appreciate another man's country, home, and family. Clearly, peace did not come nearer because

3West, The Meaning of Treason, 304.
patriotism was discredited. The fascists were so
estranged from a connection to their country or humanity
that they could slaughter both with little regard for
either. West concluded with the discouraging words:
"The trouble about man is twofold. He cannot learn
truths which are too complicated; he forgets truths
which are too simple." In the category of truths which
are too complicated came the Nuremberg trials. West went
to Nuremberg, Germany, convinced that the war-crimes
trials were necessary to prove the moral authority of the
Allies. In one way, her reports from the trial demon-
strated this effectively, but she also added to her
articles the observation that ambiguity is the price of
being human and that the will of God is not always clear.

"Greenhouse with Cyclamens I" (1946), West's
original report from Nuremberg, was published in The New
Yorker. This article was followed up by "Greenhouse
with Cyclamens II" (1949) and "Greenhouse with Cyclamens
III" (1954). These articles were compiled and published
as A Train of Powder in 1955.

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Ibid., 305.

Ibid., 301.

Rebecca West, "Extraordinary Exile," The New
Yorker 7 September 1946, 34-38, 40, 43-47.

This work contains three other articles that
were also first published in The New Yorker. Each are
The epigraph, a quote from John Donne, gives the book both its title and its metaphysical focus: "Our God is not out of breath, because he has blown one tempest, and swallowed a Navy: our God hath not burnt out his eyes, because he hath looked on a train of powder."*" In the same way the Allied powers, after the horrible World War, were obliged to go through the difficulty of creating and operating a costly and inefficient machine intended to deal out justice. Although no one, according to West, wanted the trials to take place, all agreed that there was no alternative. So great was the need for justice that it would be better for the trials to be conducted badly than not at all. West was not alone in holding this opinion. Participants, on both sides of the bench, argued for the necessity of the trial. Even one 

reports of famous trials. The first involved the lynching of a black suspect in Greenville, South Carolina by a group of white men, the second was the trial of a gruesome murder in England, and the third a suspicious case of treason in London. Rebecca West, "A Reporter at Large: Opera in Greenville," *The New Yorker* 14 June 1947, 31-65; "Annals of Crime London Masque, I, II, III," *The New Yorker* 2 December, 9 December, 16 December 1950; "Annals of Treason: The Mousetrap, I, II, III." *The New Yorker* 14 February, 21 February, 28 February 1953. Of "Opera in Greenville" Walter Lippmann said, "The New Yorker has done better reporting than any other periodical, but this is an exceptional piece, even by New Yorker standards." Quoted in lead to 14 June 1947 article.

of the defendants, Albert Speer, stated in a reaction to his indictment, "The trial is necessary. There is a common responsibility for such horrible crimes even in an authoritarian system." Justice Robert Jackson, Chief Counsel for the United States of America, in his opening statement remarked,

Never before in legal history has an effort been made to bring within the scope of a single litigation the developments of a decade, covering a whole Continent, and involving a score of nations, countless individuals, and innumerable events. Despite the magnitude of the task, the world has demanded immediate action. The demand has to be met, though perhaps at the cost of finished craftsmanship."

Nuremberg was, according to West, "a citadel of boredom." By the time the verdicts were ready to be handed down, those associated with the trial were desperately hoping they would be allowed to go home. "For all who were there, without exception, this was a place of sacrifice, of boredom, of headache, of homesickness." Yet for some who wanted the tedium to come to an end at the first possible moment, there were others who

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"were as fiercely desiring that it should last for ever and ever."\(^{45}\)

In an entry of her Nuremberg Trial diary West wrote, "It is the duty of all concerned to see that the trial in no way departs from those principles and traditions which alone give justice its authority."\(^{46}\) And while such an effort was made and was necessary, the cost was immense. American, British, and French judges were present at a banquet when a Russian judge proposed a toast to the conviction of the accused. It was difficult to see the justice of Russian Judges passing sentence on the Nazis for the rape of Eastern Europe once the world learned of the rape of Finland by the Soviets. The rules that the court felt necessary to impose almost made a mockery of the proceedings. No one was permitted to fall asleep or cross their legs while court was in session. The reason for this latter regulation West said: "The commandant had once looked up in the gallery and noted a woman who had crossed her ankles and was showing her shins and a line of petticoat, and he conceived that this might upset the sex-starved defendants, thus underestimating both the length of time it takes for a woman to

\(^{45}\)Ibid., 3.

\(^{46}\)Rebecca West, Nuremberg Trial diary, 1946, Box 55, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
become a VIP and the degree of the defendants preoccupations."\textsuperscript{50} The final amusement came when a young military policeman was given the task of waking "one of the most venerable of English judges."\textsuperscript{51} But despite the irregularities, West says, let none mock such disorganization. That the trial was carried out, despite the impossibility of smooth coordination, went a very long way in pointing out the example that a civilized people must live by the rule of law.

West contended at the time of the trial and later confirmed this view, that the basis of the trials was the correctness of trying the individual leaders of the Nazi state and not the German people. All but one of the defendants concurred with the opinion that in a nation where leaders and policy were forced on a people under a totalitarian regime then the leaders were responsible for crimes against international law and against humanity rather than the people. The one dissenter was Schacht, "who behaved as if there had been a democratic state superimposed on the Nazi state, and that this had been the scene of his activities."\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50}West, A Train of Powder, 44.
\textsuperscript{51}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 15.
The court handed down its judgments in two parts. They considered whether Nazi organizations should be condemned as criminal and membership in them subject to criminal charge. The court ruled that the Gestapo, SS, and SD clearly fit into the category of criminal. It further ruled that the military defendants were guilty of crimes against peace, crimes in war, and crimes against humanity. Obeying unjust orders was as criminal as issuing them. West was particularly impressed with the court's finding regarding the German Admiralty, part of whose accusations included unrestricted submarine warfare that neither warned ships of impending attack nor stayed to collect survivors. As the British and American Navies engaged in the same sort of activity, the Germans were acquitted of this charge. What West found encouraging was the admission that such naval protocol was unworkable. "It was written down forever that submarine warfare cannot be carried on without inhumanity, and that we [Allies] had found ourselves able to be inhumane. We have to admit we are in this trap before we can get out of it." West believed that "this nostra culpa of the conquerors" was certainly among the most important consequences of the trial. "But it evoked no response at the time, and it has been forgotten."

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The final day of the trial was given to passing sentence on the defendants. Von Papen and Schacht were acquitted. It was right that they were, according to West, because they were foxes who had covered their tracks at every turn. "It would only have been possible to get them by stretching the law, and it is better to let foxes go and leave the law unstretched." The most important achievement of the trial was carried without regard to the verdicts. The world learned what these men had done. And the world gave evidence of its opinion when it sentenced eleven of them to death, and of its mercy when it handed down seven terms of imprisonment.

The hanging of the eleven condemned was a source of concern to West. "For when society has to hurt a man it must hurt him as little as possible and must preserve what it can of his pride, lest there should spread in that society those feelings which make men do the things for which they get hanged." After recounting a brief history of the improvements made in capital punishment, which the condemned Nazis did not benefit from (Ribbentrop, for twenty minutes, slowly choked to death),

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^Ibid., 41.

^Ibid., 57.
West concluded that some evils are necessary. Finding the precarious balance between justice and mercy could never be abandoned by decent society, but the manifestations of it left West cold. She concluded:

Yet it would be treachery against truth not to concede that justice had been done. Each of these men who had been hanged had committed crimes for which he would have had to give his life under German law; and it would have been the ax that killed him. But there are stenches which not the good name of justice or reason or the public good, or any other fair word, can turn to sweetness.\(^\text{37}\)

West made two important observations in 1946 that would be the focus of the two articles about Germany which were to follow. It was already clear, less than a year after the war had ended, that the Soviet Union was establishing a system within the confines of Germany that in many ways resembled the one the Allies had come to defeat. West detected a certain irony and a certain warning when, in listening to the verdicts, she found the Russian judge reading the portion that condemned the Germans for their deportations. The Germans were condemned for treating people as though they did not matter. It was equally telling that after the trial West decided to visit Prauge. It was quite an easy task to find empty planes going east. It often took days of waiting to catch a plane heading west.

\(^{37}\)Ibid., 72.
By using her knowledge and instincts, West effectively forecast the stunning economic comeback that the Germans would experience. Not by careful analysis of economic charts, or by foreknowledge of the Marshall Plan, was this prediction possible, but through her own developed instincts regarding human nature. West met a German war veteran who had lost his leg at the Russian front and who was now in Nuremberg operating a greenhouse so that he might sell flowers to the victors who had converged, in mass, on this city. Not only was this task extraordinarily difficult because of his physical disability, but the lack of materials and the very cold European winter made the success of his task even more startling. Unlike other workers throughout the victorious countries who wanted to escape from work and worry, this man preferred to escape into his work. "Indeed, it might be alleged that he wanted to take shelter in his labour only because he and his kind had shown an exceptional disability to make the rest of life agreeable."

West returned to Germany in 1949 and found that a vast majority of the country was now occupied with one-legged men who operated greenhouses which sold cyclamens. In England, West had found that many people were critical of what was perceived as the lack of policy

"Ibid., 30."
by the American and the British governments towards their charge. The German people, however, were formulating a policy for themselves using the resources of the West, "and that policy was to develop their industry in accordance with their laissez-faire economic theories and to refuse to be impressed by the welfare state and planned economy which was actually established in Great Britain and which existed in fantasy in the minds of American intellectuals."\

West contended that the growth of the German economy very greatly reduced the Allies' guilt after the war. For though the blame of displaced persons rested on the Germans who had brought these people into the Reich as slave labor, "they had remained in Germany because they were not Communists and Mr. Churchill and Presidents Roosevelt and Truman had imposed communism on their countries without consulting the inhabitants." As well, there were those who were displaced as a result of the Potsdam agreements and those who fled from the Eastern Zone administered by the Soviet Union. The rapidly growing German economy was able to assimilate the majority of these ten million people with an ease most of the victorious countries could not have effected. Thus,

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Ibid., 121.

Ibid., 126.
according to West, the Germans served the victors by relieving them of the guilt for "a grave sin against the refugees." Though the British economy was based on the idealistic hope that no one should be in need if "his brothers can help him," it would be hypocrisy, said West, not to admit that the "devil-take-the-hindmost economy [of Germany] was merciful" to those the Anglo-Americans could not care for.

What troubled West was that with this new-found wealth that the Germans were acquiring, there seemed to be no corresponding ideology developing that would bind them "to the service of sanity and of life." Germany, she believed, was becoming consumed with industry. The greenhouse of the one-legged man seemed likely soon to encompass the entire country. They cared not what they sold, as long as there was more and more to sell.

While West Germany told this tale, West Berlin told another.

West visited Berlin while the airlift was under way. She received the impression that every one in Berlin, one way or another, felt himself a prisoner. The Russians were in a bind because their "sole idea" was proving to be much more difficult to practice than they thought.

"Ibid., 135.

"Ibid., 139."
The Russians believed that they could occupy any country they could get the Red Army into, if the they had the cooperation of the local communist organization, no matter how much the population loathed them. In the free elections held in Berlin, those in the Russian Zone continued to vote against communism. This embarrassment could only be resolved by forcing the Allies from their zones and ceasing the nonsense of free elections. In the summer of 1949, this is what the Soviets were about.

West noted the difficulty General Howley, the American commandant, had in dealing with his Russian counterpart. This interaction recalled to her mind the incredulity Neville Chamberlain felt when he learned Hitler was not a man of his word. Howley too, was learning that the world of the gentlemen's agreement was the world he had found smoldering beneath the rubble when he fist came to Germany. West made an interesting observation that had its origin in this lesson. Most of those, she said, in charge of the American Zone were men who would not stay in such positions long, but would soon go back to their homes and their jobs. General Howley was, for example, an advertising man from Philadelphia. This substantial group of civilians would return to the United States with a personal mistrust and dislike of the Soviet Union. Their British counterparts, however, were
for the most part, members of the Foreign Service who
would continue to stay abroad and be prohibited from
taking part in politics. "This is one among the elements
which, from time to time, have produced divergences in
American and British public opinion." \(^3\)

West admired enormously the resolve of the Berliners
to fight against the new form of totalitarianism that
threatened to consume them. Berlin in 1949 was a
microcosm of the new political debate that was and would
continue to play itself out throughout the century. West
left the city, with the airlift continuing, with this
conviction: "The Nuremberg trials had not changed the
Germans; the occupation of Western Germany had not
changed the Western Germans; but Berliners were changed by
the occupation of the city. . . . The resistance of
Berlin began as a soliloquy, but it must end as a
dialogue." \(^4\)

By 1954, when West returned to Germany she had a
better perspective from which to see the actual results
of both the trial, the German post-war recovery, and of
course, the continuing Russian intransigence. Though the
trial's greatest accomplishment may have come in irrefut-
ably exposing the cruelty of the Nazis, eight years after

\(^3\) Ibid., 150.

\(^4\) Ibid., 160-61.
the trial it was not easy for the general reader to lay hold of the trial transcripts, and if they were able to do so, many documents remained untranslated. The lack of correct and accessible information lead, in some cases, to the mistaken belief that the Nazi High Command was tried and convicted for obeying orders, not unlike those given by the Allies. But, said West, this was not true in a single case.

In "Greenhouse with Cyclamens III" her major source of discouragement, upon first reading, seems somewhat overstated, but one must recall that cynicism about the Nuremberg Trials in 1954 appeared frighteningly like the cynicism of the Treaty of Versailles in 1924 and 1934. "But it would not matter what uses fatigue and timidity had made of the Nuremberg trial if the noble end contemplated by its promoters had been realized: if it had given a demonstration of the Rule of Law in all its beauty to a Germany which had seen its courts hopelessly degraded by the Nazi regime."\textsuperscript{22} The publication of a book by Hans Fritzsche, Goebbels' Radio Chief, who had been acquitted at Nuremberg, entitled The Sword in the Scales expressed German bewilderment at what was perceived as the injustice of Anglo-American law. Although it "was sheer impudence of the Nazis to quarrel with the justice

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 240.
that overtook them on any ground, since they had done their best to murder justice; . . ." a great many anti-Nazi Germans misunderstood the procedure used by the court, as well. Thus, West feared that the elaborate and costly machine imposed by the Allied powers to demonstrate the Rule of Law to the lawless was lost in the muddle of procedural miscommunication. While West's concerns, as one personally involved with the trial, are certainly understandable, they have perhaps proved somewhat ill-founded.

"Greenhouse with Cyclamens III" was written as a result of West's visit to Germany with her husband who was there to attend an economic conference. She noted that the Germans, materially, were running neck and neck with the Americans, who well outdistanced any other nation in attendance. Western Germany had now, in the language of West's analogy, only one building that stood solidly: that was the greenhouse. The one-legged man was now growing enormous cyclamens. Why was this of concern?

He terrified because his absorption in industry left a vacuum in his mind which sooner or later would be filled. If no religion or philosophy or art came to bind this man's imagination to reality, then the empty space would be flooded with fantasy which would set him at odds with life. 

"Ibid., 242.

"Ibid., 248.
Nazism had been a fantasy set at odds with life. Communism appeared to West to be a similar fantasy with comparable inherent risks and dangers. The Berliners had learned this lesson, but Western Germany was lost to it.

It seemed a fresh proof of the idiocy of Potsdam that it prevented the man in the greenhouse at Nuremberg from learning the lesson Berlin might have taught him. But it was the same idiocy that gave Berlin the power to teach. The Berliners were given two experiences of totalitarianism, which demonstrated that it was its principle that was wrong, and that no matter who applied it the result would be pain; and it was the second experience, which gave them a chance of contrasting totalitarianism with the democratic system represented by the Western Allies, which counted, because they were then shut up by Potsdam in a small circle of privation with little else to think about except this contrast and its consequences. Rarely in any age has its peculiar problem been investigated under conditions more likely to lead to the discovery of truth, and less favourable to the diffusion of that truth.

In the coming decades, West committed herself and her energies to the "diffusion of that truth." More than any other thing, West came through the Second World War and the early part of the cold war with a profound and renewed respect for the Rule of Law. She summarized and personalized this lesson in a brief article she wrote in 1952 called "Goodness Doesn't Just Happen." When she

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"Ibid., 250.

"Rebecca West, "Goodness Doesn't Just Happen," in
was young, she said, she understood neither the "difficulty of love" or the "importance of law." She believed that men were basically good, and that when poverty was eliminated there would be no more breaches of the law. As a young girl, upon hearing of a pogrom in Russia against the Jews, she thought, "'I mustn't forget this, people will be interested to hear of this when I'm old because of course this sort of thing will have died out long before.'"70 The world wars must have been a particularly bitter lesson. Given man's nature, West saw the main problem of her life and anyone's life, as the balancing of competitive freedom. "For if you let a man say and do what he likes (which is necessary for the health of the world), there comes a point where he wants to say or do something which interferes with the liberty of someone else to say and do what he likes."71 Thus the law becomes the instrument of reason and arbitration in a civilized society. Since people very often fail to operate with the rule of love as a


70Ibid., 188.
71Ibid., 187.
standard, it is necessary that the rule of law serve as a safeguard.

"I realize now that what is good on this earth does not happen as a matter of course, it has to be created, it has to be maintained, by the effort of love, by submission to the Rule of Law." West never entertained the notion that the western democracies were able to maintain the laws free from corruption, but she well understood that the communist countries, those she was familiar with, had abandoned the rule of law in favor of a cruel expediency that lost sight of liberty. Since goodness did not just happen on this earth, West committed herself to seeing to it, where she could, that goodness was created by the law of love and force of the will.

*Ibid.*, 188.
Though West had never shied away from controversy, perhaps no other topic she dealt with created more passionate protest and misunderstanding than that of communism in the cold war era. She knew that her position, which was staunchly anti-communist, would be an anathema to many of her friends in Britain and the United States. West wrote to Margaret and Evelyn Hutchinson, in June of 1953, that the publication of her articles about communism in the United States, "provoked hostility as I knew they would." She continued, "It took as much courage to write them as any action I have ever performed in my life."¹ West took this personal and professional risk because she believed that communist ideology, like Nazi ideology, was tantamount to a commitment to death. Though often an ideologue, West was moved by the light of experience. As a young woman she saw and exclaimed that capitalism was nearly the devil incarnate. Socialism was

¹Rebecca West, letter to Evelyn and Margaret Hutchinson, New Haven, 12 June 1953, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Roon, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
the economic and political system to which she had pinned her hopes. But the Soviet experiment, as she learned from her friend Emma Goldman, had betrayed the best of socialism. The Soviet-Nazi pact of 1939 confirmed to her that the differences between these two doctrines was no more than skin deep. In words, organization, and uniform Communism and Nazism claimed to be enemies who could not tolerate one another, but they were mirror images of each other. The world, according to West, was surely as doomed with either system because their commitments served evil.

Soviet treatment of Eastern Europe after World War II provided more evidence of communism’s need to destroy liberty and expression. Because she believed and saw evidence that communism would of need and desire seek to expand, she condemned it as representative of the evil in the post-war world. Communism was too willing to destroy all those institutions, negative and positive, that had contributed to the creation of society. While West certainly did not favor all institutions in any society, she was keenly aware of the importance of historical continuity in the life of a people. Additionally, she believed that very often in a culture the church served as the theoretical basis for the creation and application of a society’s laws. The metaphysical
absolutes expressed in religion very often gave meaning and reverence for the law. Thus, any system that destroyed, or attempted to destroy, the eternal underpinning of a society's temporal restraints, in favor of the creation of an arbitrary and often vicious law, deserved condemnation.

In Time magazine's review of The Meaning of Treason in 1947, the reviewer made the very astute observation that, "Rebecca West is a Socialist by habit of mind, and a conservative by cell structure." Indeed, West continued throughout the 1950s to claim to be a socialist, despite what she considered to be the rather poor results of the "welfare state" implemented by the Labour Party in England after its victory in 1945.

West was not a late-comer when it came to voicing her opposition to communism. As early as 1925, she expressed grave concern about the inevitable conflict that would result between the communist and democratic systems. She had nothing to gain and much to lose by jumping into the fray during the American "red scare."

The articles that caused such a furor were published in U.S. News and World Report in the summer of 1953.

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"Circles of Perdition," Time (8 December 1947), 114.

These were not her first articles published in the United States regarding the recent difficulties with communist traitors. In 1951, "The Terrifying Import of the Fuchs Case" was published in *The New York Times.* Large sections of this article were used by the eighty-second United States Congress, Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Soviet Atomic Espionage Inquiry. Almost all of West's biographical information on Fuchs, as well as, some editorial comments were included in the published report of the committee's inquiry. Though she wrote many other articles regarding communist spies, published on both sides of the Atlantic, none caused such a stir as those she wrote about McCarthyism. Understandably, much emotion surrounded the McCarthy hearings, but West wrote as though emotional sensibilities caused by hurt feelings or tough questions should be overcome quickly in the face of a greater peril. "As a Briton Looks at 'McCarthyism,'" originally published as four articles in the London *Sunday Times,* was not an article written to support or even condone the tactics of Senator Joseph

News and World Report 3 July 1953.


McCarthy. The article was an attempt to present the facts to Europeans who she believed were being mislead, and to challenge Americans and those interested in the American scene to look beyond the hysteria of the "red scare" to the facts. It was a plea to clarify the issues and to determine where the real danger lay. Unfortunately for West, however, the articles published in the United States, were used as a defense of McCarthyism by some who sincerely misread her intentions and by others as a smoke screen.

West began by suggesting that foreign opinion regarding events taking place in America, the "witch-hunting legend," had the "slick coherence of a Goebbels lie." The power of the lie lay in the label one acquired if one quarreled with the "truth." Whether the "truth" be that Czechs were beating and killing Germans in the Sudetenland or that America was systematically harassing and destroying liberals and intellectuals, suspicion of those "facts" often resulted in the assumption of complicity or like-mindedness in the alleged crime.


"West, "As a Briton Looks at 'McCarthyism'," 60.
West stated at the beginning of her *U.S. News and
World Report* article, what she no doubt hoped, would ally
the fears of those who might think she was a right-wing
reactionary bent on the destruction of individual
freedom. Voicing support for the work of these American
committees investigating communism, unfortunately in
West's opinion, required some defense. One of the
purposes of the article was to try to eliminate this need.

Let us set it down as a preliminary to our
researches that to tamper with academic freedom is
to burn down those colleges which last longer than
the colleges built of stone, because they are
built of spirit; and that to call a liberal a
communist is an imbecility, for these are natural
enemies like cats and dogs; and that past member-
ship of the Communist Party be counted as no more
heinous than an old attack of tuberculosis. *

West's point, which was to be obscured by her very
forceful, and seemingly extreme position, was that there
was a need for society to discover and root out those
forces which were antithetical to its chosen way of life.
This is what she believed that America was about during
the early 1950s. Unlike other trials or committee
hearings that West reported on, she was not in the United
States for these hearings and was therefore forced to
write her articles from the U.S. Senate reports on
subversion in the government and from the proceedings on
the Committee on Un-American Activities in the House of

*Ibid., 60.*
Representatives. She claimed to have read all 105 volumes of the official records of the investigation committees' proceedings. While West surely did a great deal of research, she seemed to have suffered from not having first-hand knowledge of the events of which she wrote. Official reports could not, nor would they, accurately portray the sense of injustice and "witch-hunting" that many patriotic Americans felt the hearings had become. West made some good points, but she failed to understand, perhaps because of distance, that the hearings had become similar in nature to that which they sought to destroy, and therefore lost their moral credibility.

West wanted to establish from the start that those who testified at the hearings were not innocents being persecuted by a government out of control. She also attempted to substantiate the fact that there was indeed, a communist conspiracy afoot in the United States. The accusations of Elizabeth Bentley and Whittaker Chambers, whose testimony confirmed their own involvement in illegal communist activities, also alleged significant communist intrigue within the United States government. At the time of the hearings, West recounts, they confessed to being morally repulsed by their own activities and by those of the American Communist Party. Both Bentley
and Chambers implicated, in communist activities, the economist Harry Dexter White who had written the draft plan of the International Monetary Fund for the Treasury of the United States after the Second World War. How was it, West asked, that such slanderous "hearsay evidence" was permitted in open court? Not intending to provide a justification, West first pointed to the fact that Britain was as guilty of this sort of thing as the Americans. The Lynskey Tribunal, a British tribunal created by the Inquiry Act of 1921 to investigate the alleged bribing of government officials, sat for five weeks in open court listening to the same sort of evidence. She reminded her Europeans readers of this fact, lest they become so smug that they were tempted to cast the first stone. Also, these tribunals were created by laws as a result of specific breaches of national security in both Britain and the United States, and by their enquiring nature were forced to follow leads given by testimony, hearsay or otherwise. Though they had no power or proper authority to determine guilt or innocence, West failed to realize, that to be implicated in any way could cause serious repercussions. She did not believe that innocent Americans were being destroyed by association with the hearings, hence her callous

*Ibid., 61.*
attitude about the need to pursue hearsay evidence. Of course, significant corroboration would be required before any indictments would be issued. Of the House Un-American Committee, West said further, "It is hard to get justice for this body, largely because of its unfortunate name, which suggests unreasonable prejudice against yodeling or pagoda building, or worse still, such foolishness as we English often perpetrate when we use the word 'un-English.' But in fact it exists to counter activities more properly called anti-American. . . ."10

When Alger Hiss was implicated, many in the United States quickly broke into factions, as though this were a squabble between Democrats and Republicans. Bentley and Chambers became the targets of numerous attacks. But, West said, "The pair were denounced as perjurers, though it soon became very clear that whatever they were they were not that."11 Leo Pressman, formerly general counsel to the CIO, admitted he was a member of the Communist Party and participated in an underground organization, formed to steal American state secrets, whose members included persons named by Bentley and Chambers. Harry White died three days after his testimony was given to the committee. West did not believe he had been a communist

10Ibid., 62.
11Ibid., 63.
sympathizer, but it became apparent that "this gifted and playful man, began by putting a finger in every pie but ended by giving his whole body over to the rack."¹²

There was sufficient testimony given to fairly make the charge that this particular underground communist organization was not above using threats, violence, and blackmail to insure an individual continuing in its service.

West stated one of her more obvious and valid points as follows:

It would be a strange government indeed that felt no curiosity when faced with such intimations of disorder. To call such curiosity 'witch-hunting' must be the careless repetition of an impudent piece of Communist propaganda; and it cannot even be justified by the pretense that investigations at first reasonable degenerated later into 'witch-hunts.' The printed record shows no more inquisitiveness at work than the situation would have provoked in any society not manifestly insane.¹³

Her use of certain phrases, such as "Communist propaganda," was sure to incite some people to protestations of her own complicity in the persecutions, which inevitably happened.

In an attempt to prove that the committees' witnesses were not all innocent, harassed academicians, as the current thinking in Europe would have it, West

¹²Ibid., 66.

¹³Ibid.
recounted the story of Irving Kaplan. Kaplan was an economist for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company in 1935. Without taking the Civil Service exam, he went to Washington and became Associate Director of the National Research Project, a New Deal agency. He went to the Treasury and ended up as the Economic Affairs Officer to the United Nations. What was unusual about Kaplan's career was that he could not remember who he had seen to get any of these appointments nor could he remember who he served with in a variety of government positions. When asked, by the committee, for any information about his governmental posts, he pleaded the fifth amendment on the grounds of self-incrimination. He was investigated by a committee that had nothing whatever to do with Senator McCarthy. West's curious point with regard to Kaplan's story was that, without ever taking the Civil Service exam, he had been appointed to higher and higher levels within the government by "fellow travelers" who also held high positions. If Americans were not outraged that communists were filling low and high civil service jobs then they surely should be outraged at this blatant instance of "jobbery." Kaplan was a hostile witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee and would not answer questions concerning who had appointed him to various positions, or who he had worked with,
nor what he had done as part of his job. Although these
answers should have been easy to look up, many of the
files in question were missing. "The Un-American
Activities Committee had before it a civil servant who
had risen to a high position in the civil service,
drawing $10,000 a year, and who had been retained in the
service, after having been accused by security organiza-
tions of being a Soviet agent, by the intervention of
Harry Dexter White. The Committee called on the National
Archives to produce his file. It had disappeared."14
Such an example, she said, was no more a case of perse-
cuting a liberal opinion as it was a "lesson in flower
painting."15 This new spoils system enacted by the
Communist Party made the committees' questions necessary
not only to prevent cronyism, but more importantly, to
prevent espionage.

"'This animal is very wicked,' wrote the French
zoologist, 'it defends itself when it is attacked.' The
United States is in this sense very wicked indeed. It
keeps on defending itself."16 West's tone was incredu-
lious that there would be any who would protest America's
desire to keep it civil service free of Burgess and

14Ibid., 70.
15Ibid., 72.
16Ibid.
Maclean types. Her incredulity was only matched by what she perceived to be the lies abroad that surrounded the hearings.

Most English educated people have been hypnotized into a firm belief that the investigating committees have killed academic freedom in the United States, and that it is now impossible for a professor or teacher to obtain or hold a position unless his political views put him well to the right of Bloody Mary and the Bourbons. Fear, it is often said, is stalking the campus.17

West recounted the story of Harry Albaum, a professor of biology in Brooklyn College. He was urged to join the Teachers Union, and then later approached and asked to join the Communist Party, which he did. Later, in 1939, disillusioned by the Nazi-Soviet Pact and what he had learned about the Party, he decided to get out. This he was not permitted to do. He was blackmailed, and in his own words, had lived the next twelve years with "this pall hanging over me." He was afraid to testify but "could not live with it any more."

While he was testifying the committee interrupted him to point out in the spectators, Konstantine Radzie, who had been identified from a cutting in the Daily Worker as a member of the Control Commission of the American Communist Party. His job was to inquire into cases of deviation and

17Ibid., 76.

18Ibid., 77.
disloyalty. Radzie's position was later confirmed by John Lautner, a Party member from 1929-1950, who served on the Control Commission with Radzie and testified that Albaum indeed had something to fear. West mused that it was interesting how this case of terrorization of a teacher and interference of academic freedom never made the headlines in Europe.

West believed that much of the misperception in Europe regarding the hearings came the "hypnotic power of the word 'McCarthyism.'" Some believed that the United States was practically governed by this man who used the power of the committee hearings to tyrannize. West made it very clear that Joseph McCarthy had not even been involved with the hearings until the beginning of 1953. "Thereafter Senator McCarthy formed for the investigations the sort of demonstrative affection that a wet dog will often feel for a man in whiteflannel trousers." West believed that McCarthy's leadership of the committee, when he had never been a member of one, was contrived by those who had the most to gain from linking an unpopular, ambitious character to them. Certainly the association of fanaticism with the Republicans would serve the purposes of the Democrats, but beyond that, West believed that poisoning the friendship between the

"Ibid."
United States and other nations, primarily England, would well serve the communists.

West in no way defended McCarthy’s motives or tactics, nor did she show any particular fondness for him personally, but she was adamant that to equate McCarthyism with the kind of thuggery she accused the Communist Party of "is to show a lack of both imagination and of moral sense." West recounted the numerous instances of violence that befell communists who tried to break away from the Party. The murder of Trotsky, the suspicious "suicides" of Communists slated to testify at the hearings, and the murder of those who interfered with the direction of the Party are recounted to put into perspective the allegations that merely being subpoenaed to testify at the committee hearing was destroying the lives of many innocents. West did not deny that at times these hearings were conducted badly. She did not deny that the motivation of Senator McCarthy might be related more to power and ego than legitimate patriotism. But, like the Nuremberg trials, whatever the motives and inefficient machinery implemented, the moral of the proceedings should not be obscured. West believed that in the hysteria of the "red-scare," it should not be forgotten that communism, whether American or Soviet, 

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 79.
posed a significant danger to the operation of those nations who had chosen another system of government. This being true, however, does not justify West's one-sided approach to the American's handling of a potential communist threat. West had always made the point that without moral integrity, the right becomes the wrong and the purposes of life, over death, are ill-served. It may be fair to say, that had West been in the United States for the hearings, she would have achieved a better reportorial balance with regard to their desired purpose and effect.

Not unlike West, she chose to make her point forcefully and without trepidation. She was misunderstood, as she knew she would be. West never condoned the dismissal of an individual's rights. In fact, she said repeatedly that it would be better to let the guilty go free than to tamper with the law or allow the rights of the individual to be trammeled. The better question, than the one whose answer placed West in sympathy with "McCarthy's tyranny," is why West so frequently needed to be in an adversarial role with the public, and in this case, with her friends. Perhaps her dearest friend at this time, G. Evelyn Hutchinson, pleaded with her to write to the New York Times to make clear her position was not pro-McCarthy. This West declined to do. She
received a great deal of mail regarding her article. So many of the letters completely misrepresented her stated position that she did write a letter to the editor at U.S. News and World Report which was published in the 3 July 1953 issue of the magazine.

"I would be glad if you would allow me to explain why I wrote those articles, when I wrote them, and what they did and did not contain." She repeated that she wrote the article to dispel the lies and horror stories rampant in Europe that America had suspended the rule of law and was witch-hunting. Also, as the title of the American article indicated, "As a Briton Looks at 'McCarthyism,'" it was "a British writer's attempt to deal with anti-Americanism in Great Britain. Nobody could read those articles without grasping that essential fact." Further, she stated, that in the article she never defended or attacked McCarthy. She dealt with the pre-McCarthy investigations which were the basis of the anti-American sentiment she was trying to dispel. "Had I wished to deal with the McCarthy investigations I could not have done so for the excellent reason that I was writing in the latter fortnight of March and the first

21Rebecca West, "Memo From Rebecca West: More About 'McCarthyism'," U.S. News and World Report (3 July 1953), 34. (The letter is dated 13 June 1953.)

22Ibid., 35.
week of April, when he had hardly got under way and the official records of such investigations as he had conducted had, so far as I know, not reached England." 22 West continued, that as far as McCarthy was concerned she stated only two facts about him, both of which were neutral. One, that he had not played so important a role in unmasking communist activities as was believed, and two, that he had never been convicted for the type of crimes that the American Communist Party was guilty of. "I also exhorted by British readers not to waste time on brooding over their moral superiority to Senator McCarthy. This is excellent advice, which I should not hesitate to repeat, as British readers do not usually have votes in Wisconsin." 23

If West wanted it clear that she was dealing with pre-McCarthy investigations, she should have insisted that the title of her article in U.S. News and World Report not use the term "McCarthyism." Perhaps the title was an editorial decision over which she had little control, nevertheless, she could have exerted her considerable influence to have the title changed, if it had occurred to her, or if she indeed wanted to be disassociated with the name.

22 Ibid., 34-35.
23 Ibid., 35.
West received numerous letters that accused her of praising Senator McCarthy's examination of Professor James Wechsler, an incident that had provoked a storm of protest. West replied simply that her final article had been published, originally in the *Sunday Times* of London on April 12. Wechsler appeared before the committee on April 24. She concluded:

I set down this distasteful story at length because it seems that the controversial atmosphere in the United States has become less wholesome than I remember it. I find it odd that a European who has devoted some time and energy to attacking malicious misrepresentations of American life, designed to subserve totalitarian ends, should find herself the object of malicious misrepresentations at the hands of persons who explain that they are obliged to take up this attitude, not for any logical reason, but because they are afraid of totalitarianism in the person of Senator McCarthy, against whom their chief charge is that he is guilty of malicious misrepresentations. I might be amused at this had I not seen something of Germany in the early '30s, and witnessed the futile opposition to Hitler as it demonstrated that, in ideological warfare, liberals cannot afford to be silly or untruthful. The other side can be these things without losing their dynamic power, for they are not thereby betraying their own creed. But if we abandon our sense of reality and our honesty, we are false to our vows and we become disguised reactionaries contriving the defeat of the forces we pretend to serve.  

West was less willing in her private correspondence to refrain from disclosing her personal opinion of McCarthy, though she never expressed it publicly. To Dorothy Thompson she wrote, "I see no sense in what

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McCarthy does." In a letter to J.B. Priestley she went as far as to say, "I had from the beginning regarded him [McCarthy] as a stupid and violent demagogue." Though privately her own anti-McCarthyism was clear, in public she was reticent about being pulled into the controversy over the Senator for she feared obscuring the real issue at hand. The issue to her was plainly that communism, as it was being expressed around the world, was a force for evil. Inherently, communist ideology subjugated the individual, leaving power in the hands of a few. Communism was, therefore, something to be feared and regarded as an enemy.

West's interest in treason, as it expressed itself in the decades following World War II, lead her to compile massive folders of information regarding each spy or suspected spy. To be sure, the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in Britain provided ample material for examination. West wrote numerous articles during these decades about

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26 Rebecca West, to Dorothy Thompson, 16 June 1953, The George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.

27 Rebecca West, to J.B. Priestley, 22 June 1955, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

28 West's files regarding spies and traitors, such as Philby, Maclean, Burgess, Mantelli, Wynne, Blake, Fuchs, Nunn May, Hiss, Chambers and Vassall may be found in Box no. 57, Rebecca West Collection, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
Individual spies. In 1964 she published *The New Meaning of Treason* which continued the history of treason past the Nazi traitors and into the era of communist spies. Her feelings about communism having been well established, it is nevertheless interesting to see the degree to which she pursued her case. West made accusations that, at the time, bordered on slander. In some cases, however, time has proven her point. The curator of the Queen’s art collection, Sir Anthony Blunt, was one whom West accused of being a Soviet spy. It was not until 1979 that it became public that Blunt had indeed been a spy, though he had confessed to being so in April 1964 to MI5. Latest scholarship regarding Blunt contends that he, and not Harold "Kim" Philby, may have been

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28 G. Evelyn Hutchinson mentioned in an interview that West was convinced for many years that Blunt was a traitor, much to the consternation of her friends. He did not know how or where she had received this information. Hutchinson, interviewed by author.
the "ring-master" of the Cambridge spy-ring and may have
done as much damage to Western Intelligence as Philby.\textsuperscript{31}

Both \textit{The Meaning of Treason} and \textit{The New Meaning of}
\textit{Treason} have stood the test of time well. Writing as she
did, with so little lag time for historical perspective, both
works remain important contributions to recent
studies and biographies now being published. Recent
reviews of new works regarding this ever-intriguing topic
include favorable comments about West's books for the
reason that she wrote and analyzed not merely to present
the facts but to help the reader understand the minds
and motives of those who practiced treachery.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{The New Meaning of Treason}, 1964, contains not only a
slightly modified account of William Joyce, but goes on to
discuss as many of the important Soviet spies as were then
known. The large section on William Joyce, stillentitled "The Revolutionary," from \textit{The Meaning of Treason}
is included for the sake of historical continuity. West
was making the case that these new spies represented a
new phase of disloyalty, nothing more. To her, communism

\textsuperscript{31}John Costello, \textit{Mask of Treachery: The Documented}
Dossier on Anthony Blunt's Cambridge Spy Ring} (New York:

\textsuperscript{32}Noel Annan, "Et Tu, Anthony," \textit{New York Review of}
Books} (22 October 1987), 3; Stephen Toulin, "The
Conscientious Spy," \textit{New York Review of Books} (19 November
1987), 54.
was the same as fascism, "with a glandular and geographical difference." Her point was never that one should engage in a blind loyalty to one's country. Those Germans, for example, disloyal to Nazi Germany were courageous because they maintained a higher loyalty: a loyalty to life. Loyalty, like anything else beneficial was a means to an end. With regard to treason, loyalty was preferable because it served to maintain those institutions in a society that cherished life. In The New Meaning of Treason West said, "There is always loyalty, for men love life and cling together under the threats of an uncaring universe. So there is always treachery, since there is the instinct to die as well as the instinct to live; and as loyalty changes to meet the changing threats of the environment, so treachery changes also." The New Meaning of Treason was an attempt to trace, as much as possible, the changes in treachery.

Dr. Alan Nunn May followed William Joyce into the Old Bailey, and as such represented "The new phase" of treason, which is the title chapter. He was a scientist, and like many of his ilk, Nunn May would find himself the keeper of the kind of secrets that had the potential to


\[34\] Ibid., 140.
determine the life and death of millions of people. West was particularly interested in the attitude toward scientists then being expressed in society. Joyce was easy to mock and dismiss, but Nunn May and the atomic scientists who followed him into the dock, presented society with a dilemma. It was thought, incorrectly according to West, that scientists had some special gift that led them to the possession of a universal wisdom. They were thought to be ushering in a new and better era, and certainly as such, their efforts and motives in that regard would be pure and free from the arbitrary divisions among men. The scientists accused of treason often used as an excuse the notion that they wanted all the world to be in possession of significant scientific information. Most of these scientists, however, were not in the business of disseminating such information at a session of the United Nations. They were communists, passing along secrets to a nation whose system, they wanted to believe, reflected their political views.

West suggested, however legitimately, that perhaps the reason so many scientists and intellectuals embraced communism was because this group, believing in their superiority, rarely had a means for gaining power in Britain and the United States. Intellectuals, who sprang mainly from the middle-class or quickly became
middle-class, watched men with lesser gifts in business and industry become wealthy and powerful off material advances often brought about by scientific research. Rarely wealthy, the scientist and the intellectual would "rage against the old class which held the power and the new class which was taking it from them; and he would find relief in attacking the capitalist system which maintained them both." West, who held no great fondness for the imperfect capitalistic system, quarreled with those who wished to overthrow it with communism because they believed there was "nothing in the existing structure of society which did not deserve to be razed to the ground. . . . To them the past was of value only in so far as it gave indications of how to annul the present and create a future which had no relation to it." West believed then, and many modern writers concur, that the real battle of the post-war decades was a battle for morals, standards, and absolutes. Loyalty to one's country meant disloyalty to the Communist Party, and thus became disloyalty. But honor was not the point, power

\[\text{a}\text{Ibid., 144.}\]

\[\text{b}\text{Ibid., 148.}\]

was, and the pursuit of power became the cause.

Early in August 1945, Nunn May handed over to Soviet agents samples of uranium and information about the theory of atomic energy. The claim was made that he merely wanted to provide Russia the necessary information it needed to protect itself from Japan and Germany, though the war with Germany had been concluded three months earlier and the atomic bomb had already been dropped on Japan, assuring her imminent surrender. At the time the secrets were handed over, the information could only have been valuable to the Soviets for the purpose of using it against the United States and Great Britain. What made the result of the trial all the more curious was, despite the public's knowledge that Nunn May's treachery had the potential to produce disastrous results in the future, his sentence of ten years imprisonment caused a storm of protest. William Joyce's treachery could not possibly have any further consequences when he was sentenced to death. Joyce and Nunn May "were actually on a perfect parity in the dock. They had even been on the same side in 1939 and 1940 when the Stalin-Hitler pact was signed and put an end to the pretence that there is any real difference between fascism and communism." But why did the public hold

"Ibid., 158."
Nunn May precious as they did not William Joyce? Joyce was a classless thug whose existence did not hold any promises. "But the kind of mind possessed by Dr. Nunn May had seemed to hold out a promise which, it could now be seen, was not to be fulfilled." Perhaps science would not usher in the promised land.

The same promise was present in the person of Klaus Fuchs, who came of age in Germany during the Weimar Republic and fled Germany during Hitler's bid for power. He had become a communist while in Germany. Fuchs was well treated in England and eventually allowed to work on the nuclear weapons projects at Birmingham University, Los Alamos, and later Harwell. Later, the only remorse Fuchs showed regarded his betrayal of the friends he made at these places. The information Fuchs passed to the Soviets saved them a significant amount of work and time

"Ibid.

"It is interesting to note that Roger Hollis, director of MI5 from 1956-1965 was in charge, in 1941, of reviewing Fuchs security status. Hollis has recently been charged, and had been suspected in the past, of being the "fifth man" in the Cambridge spy network, which consisted of Burgess, Maclean, Philby, and Blunt. Peter Wright, Spy Catcher: The Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer (New York: The Viking Press, 1987); George A. Carver, Jr., "The Fifth Man," The Atlantic (September 1988), 26-29; Robert Chadwell Williams, Klaus Fuchs: Atom Spy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 142.
In the development of their own atomic weapons.\(^1\) He was sentenced to the maximum term of imprisonment under the Official Secrets Act, fourteen years. In Britain treason, which carries the death penalty, can only be invoked if the country abetted by the accused was at war against Great Britain.

Fuchs's written confession supported, in large measure, West's theory that treason has its roots in an incorrect view of reality. Another physicist said of Fuchs, "I have never before known a person who possesses such a marvelous ability to think in abstract terms who is at the same time so helpless when it comes to either observe or evaluate reality."\(^2\) In his confession, Fuchs mentioned his own "controlled schizophrenia," by which he was able to live among and grow to like his English friends, while betraying their individual and collective trust. He did much the same with regard to his increasing discomfort with Stalin and Soviet behavior. He, for a time, continued to believe that the beauty of communism would be revealed on the earth by the efforts of the

\(^1\)Robert Chadwell Williams contends that Fuchs gave the Soviets the fullest possible information about design and production of the first uranium and plutonium bombs, which saved them approximately eighteen to twenty-four months of work, but provided little valuable information on the hydrogen bomb. Williams, *Klaus Fuchs: Atom Spy*, 7 and 169.

\(^2\)Quoted in Williams, *Klaus Fuchs*, 177.
Soviet Union, despite growing evidence to the contrary. By 1949, disillusioned, he discontinued passing along information. What is striking about Fuchs is that first and foremost he remained a German, a good German. Initially, in the 1930s his motive had been the greater good of Germany. During the war, Nazism had to be defeated in order that a new order might be created there too. In the end, the Soviets, whom he had trusted to secure his ends, betrayed him, to the great detriment of Germany.

The arrest of Fuchs, indirectly, brought to light the activities, in the United States, of Harry Gold, David Greenglass, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. West told their story with sympathy, yet certainty of their guilt. After mentioning the fact that Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were sentenced to death in 1951, but not executed until 1953, she said: "Even though the delay was caused by exercise of rights of appeal, it added to the ordeal of capital punishment, an act as discreditable to our civilization as the crime it punished. In the eyes of many, they met death as heroes."*3

Another scientist, Bruno Pontecorvo, disappeared after working at the atomic-energy project at Harwell. Following his disappearance, it was learned that he was a

*Ibid., 205.*
communist of long standing. Again British security failed miserable in what should have been an easy check into his communist connections. West does not directly suggest in either of her books on treason, that there may have been a deeply hidden "mole," perhaps, the "fifth-man," in high places in MI5 or MI6, but she does at times seem to imply it, given the unbelievable ineptitude of the service. Pontecorvo's escape was designed according to West, to attract as much attention as possible. Whether Pontecorvo ever passed secrets to the Soviets, he was a communist, and was willing to play out an unnecessarily dramatic escape designed, "to destroy American confidence in British security organizations so far as their power to protect their atomic projects was concerned."** The rather ridiculous antics of Pontecorvo's escape became public, as planned, scarcely six months before another pounding blow hit the British. Donald Maclean, head of the American Department at the Foreign Office, and Guy Burgess, a second secretary in the Junior branch of the Foreign Service, warned that they would be brought in for questioning by SIS, MI5, and the Foreign Office, themselves made a rather obvious, but hasty, escape to the Soviet Union in May, 1951. West believed it had been Harold (Kim) Philby.

**Ibid., 214.
posted to Washington at the time Burgess was there as second secretary at the British Embassy, who had warned Burgess who in turn warned Maclean that they were under investigation. (West wrote before Philby's own defection to the Soviet Union). "Philby for a mysterious reason, was exonerated by the British authorities; but sweat poured down their foreheads as they did it."* It should be noted that, at this time, the British Government was denying that any of these men had been Soviet agents.*

West makes it one of her more significant arguments that these "escapes" were designed to further drive a wedge in Anglo-American relation, which they did. Further evidence of this came in July, 1952 when Mrs. Maclean, who could have gone to join her husband with impunity any time she chose, disappeared in a flurry of

*Ibid., 228-29. Some current writers suggest that while Philby warned Burgess, who warned Maclean, some "higher-up" almost certainly gave the signal, from London, for the pair to leave for Moscow. As well, once the decision was made to bring Maclean in for questioning, on a Friday, it was also agreed, against professional sense, that they would not pick him up until Monday. That decision, and the knowledge of it, gave Maclean time to get away. Roger Hollis in 1951 was in charge of Security for MI5. Carver, "The Fifth Man," 26-29.

*As late as 1956, then Foreign Secretary, Harold Macmillan, stood before the House of Commons and declared Philby's innocence, based on a white paper drafted by MI5. Philby's defection to the Soviet Union in 1963 set the record straight.
suspicious and well-publicized circumstances. "The required uproar broke out. America was nudged in the ribs and asked if it had forgotten Burgess and Maclean and British inefficiency, at the exact moment when a discussion between America and Great Britain on the sharing of atomic secrets was taking a critical turn.\(^4\)

Vladimir Petrov, third secretary at the Soviet embassy in Canberra, and also head of the Australian MVD, defected April, 1954 in Australia, bringing with him allegations about the activities of Burgess and Maclean. Finally, the British government confirmed the story and admitted that the pair were Soviet spies and had fled because they knew they were being investigated. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher answering questions in the House of Commons stated vehemently that it was Philby and only Philby who had warned Burgess and Maclean, thus attempting to ward off enquiries about the fifth-man. West believed that it was important for the public to know the facts of these cases, and that it was rightly a matter for the press to take up. It was important, she believed, that the truth be told about what kind of men Burgess and Maclean were. They were not peace-loving ideological communists who were so discouraged with the warmongering policies of Britain that they fled to

\(^4\)Ibid., 231.
Russia. They were rather, according to West -- and there is plenty of evidence to prove it -- "disorderly and drunken neurotics." These two, as well as the scientists accused of treachery, were not idealists. In fact, the nature of communism was such "that it must of necessity recruit far fewer idealists than any other party." The reason for this was that it would difficult for an idealist to feel happy in a party where the goal was to gain power through fraud against the will of the people.

A further reason for the Burgess and Maclean incident to be reported honestly, West believed, was that communist intrigue was not part of a reality ingrained in the English mind. It was still the stuff of clandestine conspiracies and secret societies. The story of their treason reported by those same people who reported on "real subjects," could begin to impress on the English mind that "there were English people capable of becoming conspirators." With that knowledge impressed on the common mind, English people would began to ask such pertinent questions as how two men who exhibited violent and irresponsible behavior frequently, who were known to

* Ibid., 234.
* Ibid., 235.
* Ibid., 237.
drink far too much, "even according to American standards," were allowed to continue in the Foreign Service, even occupying sensitive posts in countries whose good opinion of Britain was critical. West believed, in 1964, that the odd circumstances regarding the Government's denial of Philby as the "third man" should be questioned, and more. Her point was that freedom demanded openness and the suppression of secretiveness. The insidious enemy was surely the most dangerous. Outside of the damage Burgess and Maclean did to Britain and her national secrets, which will never be fully known, the damage they did to innocent people whose integrity was impugned by incidental involvement with the traitors, was particularly heinous. Surely Britain's allies had reason to mistrust her, as they did. But worst of all, "Great Britain had reason to think ill of itself."  

West concluded "The New Phase" with an appropriate example of the "new thinking." Terence Edward Waters, was a young officer in Korea, who was "worth while considering because of his relation to his time." Waters was captured and sent to a camp known as "The Caves," where he quickly saw that he and his men would die because there was no medicine or doctor or proper

\[ ^{1}\text{Ibid., 248.} \]

\[ ^{2}\text{Ibid., 250.} \]
food, and most of them were wounded. When a North Korean political officer came to the cave to convince the prisoners to join the "Peace Fighters" and do communist propaganda work in return for better food and medical attention, Waters ordered his men to do it in order to save their lives. As an officer the responsibility for this treason would be his, but no one could relieve him of the guilt of treason if he went with his men. He chose to stay behind and died of his wounds. "It had been his opinion that it might serve his country if the Chinese and his men saw that he was not afraid to die."\[^{53}\]

For the comprehension of our age and the part treason has played in it, it is necessary to realize that there are many English people who would have felt acutely embarrassed if they had had to read aloud the story of this young man's death, or to listen to it, or comment on it in public. They would have admitted that he had shown an extreme capacity for courage and self-sacrifice, and that these are admirable qualities, likely to help humanity in the struggle for survival; but at the same time he would not please them. They would have felt more at ease with many of the traitors in this book. They would have conceded that on general principles it is better not to lie, not to cheat, not to betray; but they also feel that Waters' heroism has something dowdy about it, while treason has a certain style, a sort of elegance, or, as the vulgar would say, 'sophistication'. . . . Burgess and Maclean were of the opinion, as they worked out their long stint of treason, that they were proving themselves much better adapted to their time than any saint or hero could have been.\[^{54}\]

\[^{53}\]Ibid., 251.

\[^{54}\]Ibid., 251-52.
The final section of *The New Meaning of Treason*, entitled "Decline and Fall of Treason," is disturbing because it chronicles the latest developments in that dirty business. In the nearly twenty year period that West had closely followed the subject of treason and the persons of traitors into the Old Bailey, she witnessed the transformation of the accused from traitor to spy. After recounting the facts behind the career and capture of Colonel Abel, West described her thoughts as she sat in the courtroom, "It is to be noted that he was not a traitor but a spy for his own country, a civil servant, part of the Establishment, and he had therefore never had to engage in the political arguments with himself which are a part of treachery."

This man, as well as those who were to follow, were professionals. They were specialists, most of whom, out of no particular ideology, were in the business of stealing the secrets of other nations. West thought back to William Joyce, and reheard his impassioned voice, "vibrating in sympathy with what he believed to be the cosmic pulse, [and] we realize that what we witnessed at the Old Bailey was the death agony of the amateur in a specialized age."

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The "Decline and Fall of Treason" discussed both the professional spy, such as Colonel Abel, and the individuals, who for whatever reason were easy prey to be used by the spies, like William Marshall. West had published a long article entitled "Annals of Treason: The Mousetrap" in The New Yorker following the trial of Marshall.57 (The article was included in A Train of Powder.) Also, certain information in this chapter was taken from The Vassell Affair (1963), a compilation of a series of articles that originally appeared in the Sunday Telegraph.58 What is so remarkable about this chapter, particularly, is the quality of West's information. Included are the stories of William Marshall, Colonel Abel, Harry Houghton, Winifred Gee, Gordon Lonsdale, the Krogers, George Blake, Barbara Fell, William Vassell, Stephen Ward, and the Profumo affair. Twenty years after the publication of The New Meaning of Treason an extraordinary amount of West's information has been confirmed. She was able to view security reports from MI5 and the Foreign Office, and along with inside information which


she surely possessed, her compilation of various incidents prove to be remarkably close to information gathered long after the fact. West even mentioned that the story of how the five people convicted in the Portland spy ring were brought to the attention of the authorities was probably a legend, "put into currency to hide the fact that the clue came from a defecting Soviet naval officer whose identity was then still being kept a secret." In fact, their capture was due to the information of a defector, a Polish Military Intelligence officer named Michael Goleniewski.

What West could not know, but certainly did suspect, was that the British secret service organizations had communist moles within them. Following the trial of the Portland spy ring, the Romer Report was issued, which was an attempt by the government to find out what had gone wrong. The report was widely interpreted as praising MI5, whose Director-General was then Roger Hollis. West notably interpreted the report as nearly neutral and openly criticized MI5 for gross failure in the Portland spy case. In fact, West suspected that the divulging of these spies might have been a ploy by the Soviet Union to

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"Ibid., 284."
to dispel curiosity in other areas, an idea that is widely accepted today.40

Of the Romer Report, West did say, it was "a document of great importance, since it was the first official admission that history had taken a sudden turn, and instead of walking along the safe road which we had thought was the only road, we were crossing a rope bridge over an abyss, without having acquired the relevant technique."41 Certainly the case of George Blake bore this out. He had been an important agent in MI6 who was found guilty under the Official Secrets Act and sentenced to forty-two years imprisonment, the result of three fourteen year convictions. Blake's betrayal had done a great deal of damage over a great number of years. He also was undone by information provided by the Pole, Goleniewski. Neither MI5 or MI6 had detected this mole in their midst, or else there was another mole higher up, who saw to it Blake was protected. West commented near the end of the book that "Burgess and Maclean would certainly have been dismissed from the Civil Service if they had not enjoyed special protection."42 Again, these

41West, The New Meaning of Treason, 292.
42Ibid., 313.
remarks show a certain prescience because it is now commonly believed that there was, in fact, a Soviet mole planted and never discovered at the very top of the British security services, although some controversy continues as to who it might be.

Vassell was another spy eventually caught as a result of evidence given by a Soviet defector. One important piece of information that was not available to West at the time was the existence of a high level defector, Major Anatoli Golytsin of the KGB. Much of the information used by the CIA, MI5 and MI6, to capture this glut of spies in a short period of time, came from this man whose code name was KAGO. It has been noted that the important defectors, during this time, all went to the United States for asylum, knowing that the British security organizations would be anything but secure for them.

West suggested that in this new era of espionage determining the motives of a spy was inconsequential and possibly damaging because it might obscure the facts, and hence the threat, of his deeds. "No court and neither House of Parliament should ever bother to inquire whether a traitor or spy be moved by ideological considerations, or is instigated by a desire for gain, or has been

obstinate in his ill-doings. One might as well ask whether a lawyer took up his profession out of a passion for justice or on the rumour of QC's fees, ..." In the conclusion, West wrote that those fascists and early communists who found themselves in the dock were unquestioningly doctrinaire. That is why, perhaps, she felt more pity towards them than these whom she wrote about later, "who have rejected all moral taboos and will pursue any prohibited activity, provided it brings them sufficient reward in money, power, or security."^45

Because those who steal secrets and those who try to prevent the thievery of secrets are often in the pay of "one or another of our social institutions," those institutions compromise themselves by engaging in the very virtueless behavior they condemn, necessarily shunning the values they seek to uphold. "The public therefore suffers a sense of impotence, and in despair engages in the devaluation of values at a moment particularly unfavourable to the creation of new ones. The march towards civilization is interrupted, and on that journey, though we have eternity before us, we are always short of time."^44 Modern espionage is a drain on

^44Ibid., 315.
^46Ibid., 363.
society's resources, both material and spiritual. "The expenditure of wealth on munitions has many times been denounced; but it is not less disgusting to pour it out on the promotion of theft and deceit."47

West suggested that embassy staffs behind the Iron Curtain be cut down, and that a bipartisan standing committee on security be established. Interestingly enough, a Standing Security Commission was created as a permanent, bipartisan, watchdog committee. She also sought to remind the press of their sacred responsibility to inform the public about what was happening in national security. Though sensationalism was a danger, ignorance posed a greater danger. In a democracy, bureaucratic change only comes through public outcry. Surely the horrific and incompetent blunders apparent in the treason and spy cases she recounted, West believed, should be public information. This was no doubt one of the reasons behind her work.

As West saw all problems within a moral framework, she reduced the complexity of the security problems of the modern world to its simplest and most common denominator. "Loyalty," she stated, "has always had its undramatic but effective answer to treason, insisting on its preference for truth instead of deceit, and good

47Ibid., 367.
its preference for truth instead of deceit, and good faith instead of bad." Indeed,

The story told in these pages shows that we would have been spared a great deal of trouble if we had simply kept our cupboards locked and had removed from our public service officials who were habitually blind drunk. But if we do not keep before us the necessity for uniting care for security with the determination to preserve our liberties, we may lose our cause because we have fought too hard. Our task is equivalent to walking on a tightrope over an abyss, but the continued survival of our species through the ages shows that, if we human beings have a talent, it is for tightrope-walking.**

West would remain acutely interested in the subject of treason, spies, and spying. The Rebecca West Collection at the University of Tulsa bears witness to this by the mass of information she continued to collect. Her files indicate that she was, in some way, in contact with the government and the security organizations with regard to this material. There is a letter from a War Department official, Room 005 in the War Office, in her files asking her to discuss with him information he thought she had regarding Alger Hiss.***

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*Ibid., 369.

**Ibid., 370.

***War Department Official, letter to Rebecca West 10 January 1951, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa. (The letter is unsigned.)
West's continuing fascination with treachery found form in her 1966 novel, *The Birds Fall Down.* This novel, which was an enormous success, was about the predicament of political absolutists. The story took place at the turn of the century in France and is, in one way, the tale of why the Russian Revolution was inevitable and the success of Lenin nearly guaranteed. The novel revolves around the struggle between a Russian aristocrat in forced exile, yet blindly loyal to the Tsar and a revolutionary anarchist who could never hope to belong in the Russian aristocratic system. Ironically they find that their ends are not so different as they would like, and neither are their means. In fact they lose themselves and their beliefs in the superfluous espionage game they play. The secret agents and double agents nullify each other and treason is seen for what it is; unreasonable and even evil. The monarchist, who believes that the duty of man is to obey God and the system unquestioningly, and the anarchist, who believes that there is no higher authority and no value in what exists, find themselves having lost sight of their goals. The good becomes secondary to success. But their success has no point because they destroy each other and leave

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Russia ripe for the likes of Lenin, and as such, they both lose and the promise of evil is fulfilled.

West's final, comprehensive statement on spying becomes clear in this novel. The political extremists who seek either to bring about a new vision or a new good by means of a rigid hold on the old system are just as mislead as those who seek their goals through a complete destruction of the system. "But there's a treacherous paradox here. There's no better guide than custom, but on all that's customary there settles a thick dust of material time, so that the mind turns away from it in distaste."

So West concluded in The New Meaning of Treason that we all "need a drop of treason in our veins." For complacency is the flip side of anarchy, and the struggle against evil is precarious.

Rebecca West made some positive and timely contributions to the struggle in the west to cope with the communist dilemma which confronted it. Her books on treason were popular and successful because there was a need within society to understand the phenomena of treachery. Unfortunately, West allowed herself to become overly cautious and suspicious, perceiving communism to be a force more powerful than in fact it was. This tendency, which may rightly be called paranoid, came from

^West, The Birds Fall Down, 258.
her experience with fascism before World War II. West was adamant, and rightly so, that the "free-world" never again be caught in quagmire of moral apathy that could bring it to destruction. Her inconsistencies stemmed from this fear. These faults, notwithstanding, West contributed significantly to the understanding of treason in the twentieth century. While her personal fear of communism was excessive, her analysis of a society that sustains and protects those who seek its death are provocative.
CHAPTER XI

"A REAL CELEBRATION OF HARMONY"
A LIFE COMES FULL CIRCLE

Perhaps no other specific topics captured West's attention, in such a full way, as those of Yugoslavia and the study of treason. The controversy that surrounded her work on both subjects, coupled with her own extreme sensitivity, lead West in other directions as she grew older. That is not to say that she shied away from controversy, but she seemed to move away from current topics that were intensely personal to her. In her fictional writing, however, the same may not be said. West made her most personal and autobiographical statement in the 1950s with the release of The Fountain Overflows.

At the same time that she was working on her treason books and investigating the communist dilemma confronting the United States and Great Britain, she was engaged in the writing of a trilogy of novels that are closer to being autobiographical than portions of her memoirs, which seem at times to lapse into fiction. The Fountain Overflows, the first of the trilogy, was published in 1956 and met with immediate success. The book was
serialized in the *Ladies Home Journal* that year, after it had soared to the top of the bestseller list in the United States.¹ It was reprinted in both England and America almost immediately and netted West a nice profit.

Although largely completed, West choose not to publish the second and third parts of the trilogy, *This Real Night* and *Cousin Rosamund*, although both were issued posthumously. She surely knew that they were good enough for publication and they were awaited by her publishers and her public. Her decision not to publish them may have come from her realization that they were simply too personal.²

West well understood the difficulty of writing about human beings, whether it be another or oneself. Shortly before the publication of her articles regarding communism and communist spies and *The Fountain Overflows*, she wrote a short article entitled "The Art of Scepticism," in which she seemed to gain some perspective on the inherent uncertainty of historical writing. "Authors who write works not of the imagination, who deal with hard


fact, have soon to realize that very few facts indeed are hard, and have to use the sceptical process overtime. It is a great pity that every human being does not, at an early stage of his life, have to write a historical work. He would then realize that the human race is in quite a jam about truth." West seems to have understood the difficulties involved in objectivity and subjectivity in historical writing and non-fictional reporting better when not engaged in the process. She cites an example of such a difficulty that she faced when she was traveling through Yugoslavia doing research for *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. She planned to visit a certain monastery that other authors had written about as one of the most "delightful places on earth." When she arrived she learned to her surprise, primarily because she was traveling with the native-born Constantine, that the place was, in reality, a "lunatic asylum." What other authors had regarded as "crowds of peasants," were actually "lunatics" the monks the monks were treating. Even with her additional knowledge, West jumped to many wrong conclusions regarding what she thought must surely have been inadequate treatment in this "under civilized" country. Because she returned to the

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monastery later in her trip, she learned that, in fact, the patients were receiving care very much in line with Western psychiatric practices, with better results that those experienced in the West.

I do not know whether that interested my readers, but I know it interested me; and my scepticism long ago led me to the belief that writers write for themselves and not for their readers, and that art has nothing to do with communication between person and person, only with communication between differing parts of a person's mind. A writer composes a book in order to put down what the warring elements in him think on some subject which interests them all, and to arbitrate between them. But how often those warring elements must be wrongly informed, . . . .

She was even able to admit, in regard to Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, that she was probably "wildly in error about other points in my book!"

West touched on an important point, in the same article, when she mused about the difficulty of writing biography. "Just how difficult it is to write biography can be reckoned by anybody who sits down and considers just how many people know the real truth about his or her love affairs. As for history, the enterprise is hideously uncertain, whether the subject matter is remote or recent." Although autobiographical novels do not have to be accurate, West experienced the same

*Ibid., 115 and 168.

*Ibid., 115.
difficulty when writing about herself in that medium. The
same may be said about her memoirs, which she never
completed but which were edited and published posthum-
ously. Like many imaginative writers, West sometimes
confused fact and fiction.\footnote{Rebecca West, Family Memories, edited and intro-
duced by Faith Evans (London: Virago Press, 1987).}

One finds, when reading West's three autobio- graphical
novels, that she continually wrote with the same purpose,
regardless of the genre. Whether fact or fiction, as she
admitted, West dealt with the warring parts of herself.
"We must understand life, if we are to master it; ...\"\footnote{This notion was confirmed to me by several of those
I interviewed who knew West well. Victoria Glendinning,
recorded; G. Evelyn Hutchinson, New Haven, CT, inter-
viewed by author, 28 July 1986, tape recorded; Faith

\footnote{West, "Goodness Doesn't Just Happen," 18.} Accordingly, she attempts to find a unity of experience
and reality that will explain the nature of man and of
the universe. The trilogy set out to follow the life of
an family through the twentieth century. In typical
fashion, West uses the experiences of these people to
infer truths about history and man in this century. She
intended to take the Aubrey family's story through World
War II and to use her own experience at Nuremberg to
provide the necessary background to place her characters.
at that event. Cousin Rosamund, however, only goes to 1929. Though the three novels did not finish the story West had intended, they are complete enough to fulfill West’s purpose. Consistent with her ever-present pessimism, it might be suggested that she found the ending too dismal to write for the reason that these characters were too personal and she could not find a happy ending. She said elsewhere, “The philosophic search for order was not unconnected to the ‘happy ending,’ which novelists have used since the beginning of their art, and is sometimes wishful thinking of the crudest sort and sometimes a real celebration of harmony.” Evidently, she chose not to engage in "wishful thinking of the crudest sort" in her own autobiographical trilogy. Though personally, she continued to search for an ending that would lead to "a real celebration of harmony."

Here, like many of West’s works, the struggles encountered by the Aubrey family are the contrasts between ultimate good and ultimate evil. She illustrates how intensely she dealt with the conflict between these forces as they raged within herself. The children of Clair and Piers Aubrey, Cordelia, Mary, Rose, and Richard

Quin, along with their cousin, Rosamund, face the conflicts common to all men, within the framework of circumstances that were unique to West's own life.

In these novels, is the statement West seems to be making a statement about herself. The Aubrey family has three daughters as West's did, but included in *The Fountain Overflows* is a son, Richard Quin. The daughter, Rose, who is the narrator of the story, along with the male character of Richard Quin, together appear to be a composite of West, herself. At one point in the story, Rose, speaking about her brother says, "When I put out my hand and ran my finger along the fine line of his jaw it was as if I touched myself. We were more or less the same person, and since one cannot envy oneself, I did not grudge him that he had got something out of the evening, and I nothing."  

Richard Quin is a person of great spirituality and goodness, who is overcome by the evil in the world and eventually killed in the First World War. He is the martyred innocence of Rebecca West. It is also significant that the character is male, for West, with her Edwardian roots, considered many of her own attributes and portions of her personality to be male. She said many times that she believed if her talents and

"West, This Real Night, 152."
personality had been in a male body, she would have been a more famous and well-liked individual."

The children in the story represent the levels at which life may be lived. Cordelia, the oldest sister, is the only one of the girls who is not a talented artist, although she thinks she is a genius. West shows continual disdain, by means of Cordelia, of a life unexamined, because it is artless. Cordelia never seems to understand what has happened to her because her grasp of reality is superficial. Mary and Rose, who are twins, are also very talented musicians. As such, they are engaged in the artist's effort to analyze and understand experience, which leads them down different paths. Mary eventually withdraws from life while Rose remains functional, marries, and learns how to deal with her difficulties regarding physical love. Cousin Rosamund, according to West, represents religion, which is a level beyond art. Rosamund was to Rose and Mary, "all that

"If I were a male author, and one of my reputation (except that like you I'd have a far higher reputation if I were male) everybody would be damned sorry for me if I had a wife who acted as Henry does; ..." Rebecca West to Emily Hahn, 15 June 1960, quoted in Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 226; "I would have written better and I would have written much more. . . . [Men] don't really have any barrier between them and their craft and certainly I had." Writers at Work: The "Paris Review" Interviews Sixth Series, George Plimpton ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1984), 37.
their art did not give them."12 When Rosamund decides to marry a man of questionable repute, West staged her ultimate battle between good and evil. She effectively makes her point, both in terms of the novel and its statement about life. Love is the most powerful force manifest among men, but within the world was the negation of love, and that negation, West believed, is nonsense. In the world love/hate, order/disorder, and sense/nonsense stand in juxtaposition to one another. The conflict between these elements were the battle to which all West's works refer.

That sense be made of the seemingly "mad" history of the Balkans, that nonsense be defeated in the trial of William Joyce, that love rather than hate be the standard by which nations and individuals deal, that order (Nuremberg) be imposed when lawlessness threatens, these are the aims of one who seeks answers from experience. Throughout her life, West often startled her friends because of the adamancy with which she took a position. At the end of the 1950s, West's "communism decade," she wrote a short story that was originally published in The New Yorker. One line in that story betrays her own consciousness of and confusion about her own tendency to

12West's synopsis of the trilogy is unpublished, but portions of it do appear in Glendinning's "Afterword," Cousin Rosamund, 291.
go to extremes. She said, through the character, Parthenope, "There is an extravagance in the means my sanity took to rescue their madness that makes one uncommonly like the other." But because West viewed events or particulars as representative of the existence of absolutes, she was forced, on occasion, to make events fit a pattern that was illustrative of a moral. Thus, she fell into the trap of establishing a cosmology that was so important to her individual existence, that, at times, it was protected at the expense of the truth.

The struggle of opposing forces operative in the world again became matter and took on life when West visited South Africa and wrote a series of exclusive articles for The Sunday Times. Her byline read, "Dame Rebecca West is visiting South Africa on a special mission for The Sunday Times." West traveled around South Africa for over three months at a pace that would be impressive for a young person; she was almost seventy. As it often went with her, her timing was excellent.

--Rebecca West, "Parthenope," The New Yorker 7 November 1959, 77.


She visited the country during the Sharpeville riots and the declared state of emergency that followed them. On April 9, West was at the Johannesburg Agricultural Show and Union Festival when Prime Minister Verwoerd, the leader of the Nationalist Government and the architect of apartheid, was wounded in an assassination attempt. Her account of the incident was on the front page of *The Sunday Times*.  

West was an unequivocal opponent of the policy of apartheid. In her first article, entitled "The Nemesis of Apartheid," which was a brief prelude to the four-part series, she stated that the Sharpeville riots were the direct result of a series of provocative acts applied to the Africans. Among the most appalling measures, according to West, was the pass system, which was nothing more than a legal means of harassing the African into remaining wholly within his own township where, of course, he could not make a living.  

Because of West's extended visit, her extensive traveling throughout the country, and the company that she kept, Afrikaners in opposition to the government's policies, her articles recount vividly the horrors of South Africa in 1960.

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While at a dinner with some of her friends, the news came of a massacre of 67 Africans at Sharpeville, with over 186 wounded; they were protesting the pass system, which West believed, "... all intelligent white people know to be ill-conceived, incompetently framed, and dishonestly administered." It was only a matter of time before the first wave of black nationalism crashed into the policy of apartheid. Africans in Sharpeville, which was not a shanty town, but rather one of the "model" housing areas planned and built by the government, chose on the morning of 21 March 1960, to protest the pass system, which did them untold harm and made their lives exceedingly difficult. From the age of sixteen the pass system required that every African carry a pass at every moment. The document contained the bearer's photograph, name, tax receipts, and record of employment. It was required to work, travel, and live anywhere with the exception of a jail. "Only natural slaves would have submitted to them [pass laws], and the African is not that. He is only a man who has had the bad luck to meet a number of people who are natural slave-owners." Two newsmen from Drum magazine were at Sharpeville on 21

1 West, "In the Cauldron of Africa: The Death of a State," 12.

1* Ibid.
March. Humphrey Tyler and Ian Berry confirmed, along with photographs, that the police opened fire on a crowd whose most hostile actions was singing and chanting. Many in the crowd were laughing and smiling, as the pictures confirm, believing that the police were shooting blanks. They were not.

Perhaps, an expected incongruity of one born in 1892 and writing in 1960 about racism, is that West and the Afrikaners with whom she stayed enjoyed the luxury of African domestic help. Her hosts also owned a business that was staffed almost entirely by educated Africans whom they "treated as family." Perhaps West, sensing the incongruity, felt the need to include this statement.

The articles West wrote that went back to England and were published in The Sunday Times differed in tone from a personal story written, but never completed, about the same trip. She portrayed herself, in the latter, as naive and trusting, while the articles for publication were authoritative and knowing. While this distinction is not startling, the unpublished story is refreshingly honest because West displayed a sincere trust of the native African and was shocked and suspicious when

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told by another English journalist that she should not walk the streets of Johannesburg at night. How often, she wondered, did the white man create expectations of the black man that sooner or later he was bound to fulfill? While she traveled and researched exhaustively, she wrote in the unpublished account,

How shall the secret and mystery of any people be penetrated by the child of another? Being half Scottish and half Irish, born in England and bred in England and Scotland, I can never know the truth about South Africa. Nevertheless, foredoomed to ignorance as I am, I yet might pluck some information about the plight of South Africa which would enlighten my ignorance to a degree which would permit me to give similar partial enlightenment to my equally ignorant fellow-countrymen; . . .

At any rate, West's articles for The Sunday Times were trenchant in their analysis of the problems confronting the Union. She called for a new government with a new policy toward the African, well aware that the Nationalist hold on power was strong. She recommended to her countrymen the Progressive Party, which while only holding twelve seats in Parliament, proposed some viable solutions to the troubles facing South Africa. In addition, West encouraged specific members of the South African Parliament to continue and increase their opposition to the Nationalist Government. She stated

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21Rebecca West, [Unfinished and unpublished story about her trip to South Africa] January 1960, Box 75, [photocopy], 26, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
categorically, speaking to any of the opposition parties, that in their platforms a "... total opposition to the policy of apartheid is necessary. It should be accompanied by an alternative policy, but this should not be tainted by any degree of compliance with apartheid."²² A compromise on this point by either opposition party, though she considered the United Party "gently irrelevant," would weaken their moral authority and place them in the unenviable company of the Nationalist Party. Unfortunately, the Progressive Party had only twelve seats in Parliament to the Nationalists 102 and the United Party with forty. Progressive policy, she believed, was "talking sense, but twelve men cannot talk sense loud enough to drown the voices of 142 men, particularly when they are talking nonsense which carries further."²³

Though West would later be accused, in a letter to the editor of The Sunday Times, of lumping all Afrikaners in the pro-Apartheid category, nothing could be further from the truth.²⁴ She remained careful not to deal with the white population as though they were monolithic and succeeded in explaining, not only the differences in

²²West, "In the Cauldron of Africa: Colour Persecution in the Cape," 11.

²³Ibid.

Parliamentary parties, but also in giving credit to municipal governmental workers who were truly interested in bettering the conditions of the Africans. To be sure, she portrayed quite sympathetically many whites who were horrified by their government’s policies and did what they could on a personal level to aid such Africans as they knew. In response to the author of the letter, who claimed that 90 per cent of all Europeans supported the policy of Apartheid, West wrote, "But, really, the world could hardly continue to exist if 90 per cent of any population were as stupid as that; and my own personal observation showed that the proportion is far smaller." 

In the third of her series of articles, West examined the South African judicial system as it dealt with a three and one-half year long trial of alleged members of the outlawed African National Congress and others. She introduced the Treason Trial with a restatement of her position (as developed in her discussion of William Joyce’s trial) that the criterion for treason in English law is based on the very sensible notion that protection attracts allegiance and allegiance attracts protection. West then recounted examples of how the state of emergency imposed after the Sharpeville

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25 Rebecca West, "Letters to the Editor: Afrikaners and Apartheid," The Sunday Times 22 May 1960, 32.

riots led the government to enact Police State measures of the worst kind. Africans and many white "liberals," whom the government lumped together with communists, had lost any semblance of civil liberties that may have previously existed. They were confined to their homes, refused contact with their fellows, prohibited from writing, and often treated violently. A great many South Africans were not receiving protection from the state. In fact, in many cases the opposite was true. The accused, in the Treason Trial, were charged with advocating violence and revolutionary action. The State's case against them rested on the fact of their membership in the African National Congress or compliance with the Congress's "revolutionary aims:" the abolition of apartheid and the enfranchisement of the African in his own country.

In describing the trial, West made the mistake of summarizing two questions Justice Kennedy put to a defendand. He asked, according to West, a question that implied that working for the Black, adult franchise was

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treasonable because there was no provision for it in the South African constitution. In addition, because the white minority of South Africa would never agree voluntarily to such a proposition, did that not imply the intent of illegal or revolutionary action? West went on, quite rightly, to accuse the government of actions "so bizarre. . . so disrespectful to the institutions which maintain the safety of the State. . . , that it was bound to self-destruct and destroy that which it sought to preserve."

Unfortunately for West, Justice Kennedy protested West's summary of his questions and threatened to take legal action against The Sunday Times if a correction and apology was not forthcoming. The transcript of the trial bore out Justice Kennedy contention and the case was settled out of court. According to Glendinning, West "let it be known" that she believed the transcript had been tampered with, but privately she conceded that she had not been in the courtroom at that crucial moment and had the questions related to her second-hand. She failed, in this situation, to take her own advice and use the "sceptical process overtime."

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29Ibid., 12.
28Glendinning, Rebecca West: A Life, 226.
In the fourth article of the series West argued in favor of the qualified franchise for the African, of the total disruption of apartheid, and she reminded readers in Great Britain that all Afrikaners were not hate-mongering racists. Her argument of the qualified franchise had nothing to do with the African being black; rather it was based on the assumption that tribal Africans, many of whom still accepted witch-doctors, would need to go through an assimilation process before participation in a democratic system was practical. Remedial education, she believed, was education enough.

Despite the unpleasant and embarrassing incident with Justice Kennedy, West considered her trip a success. She appeared on Edward Murrow's *Small World* television program and was well received according to her fan mail. She was roundly applauded for her "smashing indictment of apartheid." One letter mused about how nice it would be if "public questions could always be discussed with such clarity, understanding and distinction."³¹

She also delivered an address before a joint meeting of the Royal African Society and the Royal Commonwealth Society in the summer of 1960. The lecture was published in *African Affairs* in October of the same year. It

³¹James M. Cain, to Rebecca West, Buckinghamshire, England, 27 April 1960, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
appears that she rendered a more scathing indictment of conditions in South Africa on Murrow's program than she did in her address to the societies. When questioned about the seeming incongruity, West replied that she had been asked by the Royal African and Royal Commonwealth Societies not to discuss the political situation in the country and she did not. It is curious, however, that West would acquiesce to such a request, because the lecture ended up sounding very positive about the South African government's attempt to improve conditions for the African.

West did not cease to discuss apartheid or its effect on both white and black in South Africa. Her African experience had been important to her, and she continued to write and speak of it when asked. West seemed to find in the collective plight of peoples the lessons and struggles of the universe writ small. It was easier for her to love a group of people, or pity the plight of a people, or be passionate in fighting for the rights of a people, than it was for her to love or pity or aid individuals, though it would not be fair to say she never broke through the collective to the individual.

Rebecca West, "Impressions of My Visit to South Africa," *African Affairs* (October 1960), 309.
She had the opportunity to speak of her experiences in South Africa when she delivered the Giff Edmonds Memorial Lecture for the Royal Society of Literature. It becomes clear, when reading this lecture, that West looked on the young African nationals as being in much the same position she found herself in, as a disenfranchised, young women in an England desperately trying to hold on to the empire. Not that she in any way equated her own circumstance to those circumstances created by apartheid, but she well understood, from her own experience, the folly of obsession with single issue politics. Young Africans, of the type with whom she spoke, believed passionately in "one man, one vote." They were certain, as West had been certain forty-five years before, that the vote for the disenfranchised would pave the way for the perfectability of their society. As she spoke to one young man, she thought sadly, that he was a pathetic

[3] West's aid of time and money to the many Yugoslav refugees who made requests of her illustrate her ability to deal with the individual. There are over 500 letters between West and the Gavrilovic family alone. Nevertheless, she seemed more comfortable dealing with the wider and less personal issues involved in European foreign policy affecting Yugoslavia. Cabinet 2, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.

figure. "It was so certain that the more he got of what he wanted, the more he would be forced towards all he rejected today. . . . The mere assumption of power, the exercise of the will, will make this young man and his kind more fully acquainted with sorrow than ever before." West had pointed out many times earlier in the century when discussing the Labour Party, that dissent is far the easier course than assent. She hoped that some day, the African to whom she spoke, would have the opportunity to learn this lesson.

This young educated African was studying English literature, and was critical of its frivolity. Shakespeare, he said, lacked serious interests. In the new Africa which he envisioned, writers would pursue more profitable and practical ends. Such works would glorify the African and help define the new society. West believed, however, that if this "new Africa" ever did emerge its citizens would discover that the instruments of power were imperfect and the wills that control them weak. A society, of necessity, will develop imaginative literature to deal with its follies and make cohesive its experience. Comedy will be written, "though laughter cannot be proved to serve any useful purpose,"

and tragedy, "although that must always be based on themes not immediately encouraging." ²²

They will learn that literature is a necessity: that once a society becomes fully self-conscious and reflects on its fate, it needs the literary process, by which experiences are analysed, broken up into their component parts, and their essential nature established, and these findings synthesized into an image, into a work of art, empower us to go on living with the added strength of extended knowledge.²³

West had no doubt that the African could produce excellent, imaginative literature, despite opinions to the contrary by those who believed him naturally inferior. She rebuked those with such opinions for being ignorant of history. Repulsive and shocking customs, which some tribal Africans practiced, were no proof of inherent inferiority. Europeans had engaged in similar practices for many hundreds of years, and one could argue they were still engaged in the most repulsive and ignorant forms of superstition. "The truth is that all human beings are liable to be revolting and absurd; the faculty for being base is built into them." ²⁴ When a nation begins to encounter collective experiences, those events that modify a philosophy by bringing increased knowledge, then that nation has need of those who

²²Ibid.
²³Ibid., 193.
²⁴Ibid., 194.
synthesize experience and make it visible in a form recognizable to others, such as a play, short story, novel, or poem. Africans, she was sure, would develop their imaginative literature.

West had, from her earliest efforts at writing, been involved in the process of criticism of imaginative literature. Perhaps, the most consistent form of writing in which she was engaged was literary criticism. Throughout her entire career, while writing fiction or nonfiction, she continued to review books for Britain and America's most prestigious newspapers and journals. This work not only provided her with consistent income, but also kept her involved and knowledgeable about the larger literary world. Following the incident with Justice Kennedy, West severed her relationship with The Sunday Times and was immediately signed by The Sunday Telegraph to write articles and review books, which she did until her death in 1983. One might conjecture that West's always interesting and often scathing reviews did not win her many friends among her peers. Though her reviews were often brilliant, witty, and biting, many were sure to offend.39 No doubt that circumstance has harmed West's

39Glendinning concurred with this assessment. West did nothing to endear herself with those most likely to write well of her after her death. Glendinning, London, interviewed by author, 25 October 1987, tape recorded.
legacy because those she criticized were also those most likely, by their art and access to a medium, to keep her memory alive after her death.

Her interest in literature led her to deliver the Terry Lectures at Yale University in 1957. Yale University Press published them as *The Court and the Castle: Some Treatments of a Recurrent Theme.* West explored the artist's treatment of the nature of man and his relationship to the universe from Shakespeare to Kafka. She described the moral dilemma of man and the artist's attempt to illuminate the process of life in the age in which he lived. To do so, some artists accepted their society while others felt compelled to reject it. That topic mirrored West's own very personal struggles over whether to shun or embrace her own society. Possible she took up the topic, which was her idea, to attempt to resolve her own conflicts.

The stated purpose of the Terry Lectures was not the promotion of scientific investigation but rather the assimilation and interpretation of scientific discovery.

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into a broad platform of philosophy and religion." As far back as the 1920s West contended that the artist was capable of explaining, within the framework of his culture, what was happening to human beings and why it mattered. Science explained how things happened. Within *The Court and the Castle* she continued the theme began thirty years prior in *The Strange Necessity* that, in many ways, science and art offer the same advantages to their society. In 1958, the year after she gave those lectures, West contributed to a series in which "eminent thinkers survey the Destiny of Man in the light of Sir Julian Huxley's recent article on evolution." West contended that mankind has always known man was supreme. Understanding the evolutionary process was not necessary in order to come to that conclusion. Art had provided a forum for that discovery long before science could explain it. West rejected Huxley's premise "that most people do not know what happened to them until they know how it happened."

In both *The Court and the Castle* and "Man's Dual Nature," West reiterated the theme that art analyzes and synthesizes data and experience in a manner

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**Ibid., 306.**


**Ibid.**
similar to the scientific process, but art is capable of rendering life-promoting conclusions before science explains how.

Rebecca West remained busy and productive throughout the 1950s and 1960s. *The New Meaning of Treason* and *The Birds Fall Down* were both published in 1960s along with numerous short stories and articles. She published no books in the decade of the 1970s, though the pace of articles and reviews did not slow down. Many honors came to West towards the end of her life. In 1959 she became Dame Commander, Order of the British Empire. The irony of such an award was not lost on those who recalled her remarks from the age of eighteen onward, regarding the Empire. She accepted it, she said, to bolster the position of women writers and journalists, "who are a downtrodden class." Also, she clearly enjoyed the symbolic meaning of being accepted by a society she had felt estranged from for, perhaps, most of her life. She admitted publicly in 1981, "I should like to be approved of . . . . I hate being disapproved of. I've had rather a lot of it." She also received in 1957 the French

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**Rebecca West, to Douglas and Mia Woodruff, 5 January 1959, The Douglas Woodruff Papers, Special Collections, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C.**

**West, Writers at Work, 11.**
award, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and was made an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Her awards, stand beside the numerous honorary doctorates she received from universities on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a further tribute, her publishers, with her help, issued in 1977, *Rebecca West: A Celebration.* This selection from her works, dating from 1918 to 1974, stands as a tribute to the eclectic nature of West, the writer. In 1982, Viking Press, in association with Virago Press, published a compilation of her early works, *The Young Rebecca: The Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-17.* Most of the articles in this collection would have been consigned to obscurity because they were published in journals that are now difficult to obtain. In her diary, West wrote, "I hate reading my old stuff, but I realize as I turn over the pages how cracking good they are."  

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40Rebecca West, Diary Entry, 22 January 1982, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa.
West's interests in the last decades of her life, both publicly and privately, remained consistently rooted in her own ever-expanding process designed to "read the riddle of the universe." For a brief time, in 1968, after the death of her husband, she gave up. Tired of body and spirit, she wrote to a friend, believing she soon follow Henry in death, "I am sitting on my suitcase at a railway station."** As Glendinning replied, "She did not sit on it for long."** Indeed, West lived the last full decade of her life with a vengeance. She remained busy and committed to those ideals that had sustained her.

The interviewers and requests for articles never stopped coming. She was frequently asked to comment upon current situations, which she did from a perspective or experience and authority. Rebecca West spent a great deal of time near the end of her life considering her own impressions of the world. In 1982, the year before she died, she wrote about herself as a young girl at the turn of the century. "We had to recast our impressions of the world as it had been altered by the work done by the last generation in the way of thinking and feeling; and once


**Glendinning, **Rebecca West: A Life, 237.
we had done that we had to work out what our place was in this new world.\textsuperscript{31} As an older women West often reflected on what her generation had been able to accomplish with what they were given and what they had left for the next generation. Unfortunately, she could not find much to be hopeful about, except that as long as mankind existed, so would love. And love being the force of life, it might one day prevail. Rebecca West died on the morning of 15 March 1983 at her home in London, which was the city of her birth ninety years before.

\textsuperscript{31}West, 1900, 72.
CHAPTER XII

THE COMPLETION OF THE PROCESS

Rebecca West thought of herself, above all else, as an artist. Her philosophy of art was based on the artist’s ability to discover something about reality that could make a contribution to the cumulative body of knowledge that already existed. Because of her belief in a transcendent unity of experience, West approached each subject determined to learn where it fit into the various processes at work in the universe. Though she never unearthed what she perceived to be a final answer, she held out hope that her researches might contribute to the process, thereby rendering her human experience complete.

In many ways, West’s personal, artistic, and political evolution mirrors the evolution of the century of which she was a part. Her political evolution was, perhaps, not unusual for one born in 1892. What made her unique was how public this private process was. Being who she was, West was forceful no matter what her opinion. In 1918 she had retained some faith in women and in the Labour Party. Not as trusting as she had been
six years earlier, she could still foresee the possibility of true reform under socialism.

The acquisition of political power by women may mean either of two things. If the Labour Party forms an Army of brainworkers by fostering intellect in girls by a liberal education, and preventing it from being destroyed in women by the capitalist war on mothers, and if it controls government so firmly that no administrator of my class will be able to do other than the right, then it may turn England into Paradise. But if all it means is that the female of the species which governs us at present is to be allowed to get up and stand beside the male, then it will turn England into a Primrose League picnic. For reasonable beings there is no choice.¹

One of the hardest lessons for West to learn was that human beings are most often not reasonable. Again and again she wrestled with a humanity that gave up happiness, abandoned itself to nonsense, and embraced death. What startled her most was her own preference for the unpleasant.

Looking back on England in the early part of the century, the process of change in West’s views on government and human nature become clear.

Where the Webbs went wrong was in attempting to design the framework of a new Socialist Britain, which was to be governed, to use Mrs. Webb’s words, by an elite of ‘unassuming experts.’ These words indicate an ideal impossible to realize, and long ago rejected by the British people, who noticed that there is no such thing as an unassuming elite. Human nature does not permit

it. Furthermore British history has proved conclusively that Britons desire to be governed not by unassuming experts but by bumptious amateurs, because they rise and give tongue and disclose what they are up to, so that Parliament is able to throw out the more dangerous incompetents.\textsuperscript{2}

Though, as late as 1945 West recorded that she voted Labour, and stated in print in the early 1950s that she was still a Socialist she eventually turned her attention to the party most dedicated to the fight against communism, though she never made any sort of commitment to the Conservative Party. Near the end of her life she wrote an article voicing admiration for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.\textsuperscript{3} She liked Thatcher’s tough-mindedness and remarked that with the complicated, interrelated, world economy being what is, it made a great deal of sense to have a leader who was a capable tax attorney, rather than, as she had commented years earlier, a man who cross-examined scoundrels all day. Before the British general election in 1979, the Washington Post asked for her views on the candidates. West stated her preference for Thatcher, but cautioned that she had a handicap. It “is her sex. Men would rather be led to ruin by one of

\textsuperscript{2}West, 1900, 134.

\textsuperscript{3}Rebecca West, "Thatcher: The Politician as Women," Vogue September 1979.
their own than saved by a woman."* In the same article West said she no longer held any formal political faith. "I just try to serve the cause of liberty as I can, in the style of Eliza in Uncle Tom's Cabin, who leaped from ice-pack to ice-pack as the bloodhounds bayed behind her."=

At the same time she abandoned any political faith, she made it perfectly clear that the twentieth century had done little to solve the problems between men and women. Though she had, at times, been very happy with Henry, her marriage relationship was a source of nearly constant frustration and grief. She harked back to the theme that men had been trained to engage in behavior that was threatening to the maintenance of society and promoted the death instinct. Explaining why even if Margaret Thatcher came to power, life would not be smooth, she said, "We must remember that males in the House of Commons, on either side, will certainly sooner or later, let her down. I am proud that as a young girl I worked for women's suffrage; but I fear it would have been better if at the same time I could have worked to


=Ibid.
take away the vote from men." Her frustration regarding the stalemate deeply entrenched within the political and gender framework is clear.

West said near the end of her life, in a television interview with Bill Moyers, that the current (1970s and 1980s) mood in art was "a desperate search for a pattern." That description was a most apt summary of her own personal and professional aims. Her own search for a pattern led her to examine religion in more than an intellectual, historical context as the years progressed. Her statement about her own religious life was honest and to the point.

As I grow older I find more and more as a matter of experience that there is a God, and I know that religion offers a technique for getting in touch with Him, but I find that technique difficult. I hope I am working a way to the truth through my writing, but I also know that I must orientate my writing towards God for it to have any value. It is not easy but I remind myself that if I wanted life to be easy I should have gotten born on a different universe.

West was convinced that life was to be lived for love, which produces pleasure. Pain should not be the goal, and suffering should not be glorified. A dying character

*Ibid.


"West, "Goodness Doesn't Just Happen," 188."
she created in *The Birds Fall Down* had lived his life rebelling against the circumstances his actions had imposed on him. He had believed that his agony would serve some purpose either in heaven or on earth. "I impudently expected my agony to be a sacrament to be the symbol in this material world of an event in the spiritual world."* Thus, the dying man began to understand the appalling consequences of his mistake. "Since I didn't understand that God and His Son are unique, I didn't grasp that his suffering was unique and unlike that of any human being. Therefore I was lead into the blasphemy of supposing that because His suffering has meaning, so has mine."* Pain, West concluded, was not more meaningful than pleasure. And the only significance of suffering was that it warned the human animal that he must extricate himself from the source of his misery.

She could abide no formal religion that glorified the crucifixion of Christ above the life of Christ. Though in her heart the Eastern Orthodox Church held a special place, she could not comfortably worship in a church that was so foreign to her. And while she never settled into any religious orthodoxy she continued to chart her own course to truth.

*West, *The Birds Fall Down*, 257.

*ibid.*
West writings, both fiction and nonfiction, reflect the course she chose. Her work was less an occupation than a vocation. Her motive went beyond that of the creation of good art. She worked to create cohesion in a universe best characterized by disarray. Though she never said otherwise, this fact makes it difficult to fit her neatly into a genre, define her as a person and artist, and examine the development of her work within the genre. As important as being defined as a writer of great merit, there ought to exist a definition of Rebecca West as a thinker. For what is common to her eclectic opus is that she forcefully propounded ideas, shook loose staid preconceptions, and recommended new ways of perceiving politics, religion, art, culture, law, and morality.

That she often erred was the risk taken by one who recorded events as they happened. That she was, at times, adamant past the point of constructive stubborness was a natural trap for one with the personality to pursue the difficult and unpopular. Rebecca West, most likely, could have attained a secure position in history as a writer of fiction, or as a first-rate journalist, indeed many would argue that she has. But she went beyond the safe world of a "woman writer," ignoring the limitations of appropriate topics imposed by a society obsessed-
with propriety. She wrote history with a personal and
dramatic flare which will forever exclude her from
holding the rank of historian. And she engaged in the
kind of scholarly, historical controversy that was sure
to make enemies. The law of averages ensured that some
of her unequivocal stands would be wrong. Perhaps she
did not know that history prefers equivocation. She once
said of Saint Augustine that his errors were the result
of his position in time and therefore, not disgrace-
ful. This generous assessment may also be said of West.

She outraged many later twentieth-century feminists
for her unwillingness to "join the movement." West
preferred to live the movement. As a young woman she
abandoned single-issue groups choosing rather to find her
own enlightenment and liberation and contribute through
her art. Even so, it would be unfair to suggest that
West was not an activist. As a young woman she could not
have been more involved in obtaining the right to vote,
which has served as the cornerstone of the twentieth-
century feminist movement. She remained committed
throughout her life to the fight of advancing the rights
of women, at the same time, she exerted considerable
effort trying to reconcile the misunderstanding that
frequently kept men and women apart.
Some readers of Rebecca West are disturbed by her conclusions regarding human nature. Human nature is disturbing. To one with West's natural melancholy it is a wonder she continued to hope at all after witnessing, fully-conscious, the whole of this century. The unknown author of the article in Time magazine, 1947, was uncannily astute in explaining West's seemingly contradictory position about human nature.

The root of the misunderstanding is that in a world racked by partisan passions, which more and more insists on viewing man in black and white, as caricatures of good and evil, she finds them blends of both. Her view asserts the faith that what distinguishes men, not so much from the brutes as from their more habitual selves, is the fact that however tirelessly they pursue evil, their inveterate aspiration, invariable even in depravity, is never for anything else but for the good.¹¹

West's views regarding human nature were based, it would seem, upon a rather personal and individual model of herself. Though she longed for the good, and saw large doses of goodness in herself, she as often pursued the bad. She saw herself capable of many pleasant things, of love, kindness, and goodness, but like mankind, there was that part of her that clung to conflict, hate, and rebellion. In an illuminating passage in "Greenhouse With Cyclamens II," she wrote: "Were it possible for us to wait for ourselves to come into the room, not many of

¹¹"Circles of Perdition," Time, 118.
us would find our hearts breaking into flower as we heard the doorhandle turn. But we fight for our rights, we will not let anyone take our breath away from us, and we resist all attempts to prevent us from using our wills."

The process of Rebecca West’s life was an attempt to resolve the conflicts of her humanity and bring together the disparate pieces of information which the universe offers. West wrote in 1982, a year before she died, "A Public Person runs a risk of having the Private Person within him or her wither away." She felt depleted towards the end of her life, musing that "the awful thing about being ninety is that it brings down on one duties that could only be discharged by the young and unexhausted." She wrote reviews and took visitors until she died. The effort exhausted her but not making the effort would have terrified her.

Ironically, Walter Lippmann once wrote a description of H.G.Wells that is a classic summation of the life of Rebecca West.

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12West, "Greenhouse With Cyclamens II," in A Train of Powder, 144.

13West, 1900, 165.

14Rebecca West, "There is Nothing Like a Dame," Vogue February 1983, 384.
. . . He seemed to be buffeted from both sides, challenged by his dreams, which revolted at the compromise of reality, and assaulted by reality which denounced the emptiness of all dreams. He seemed to spend himself in that struggle—the severest that a man can face; and he seemed to win by a constant renewal of effort in which he refused to sink either into placid acceptance of the world, or into self-contained satisfaction with his vision.  

West, perhaps, did win because she constantly renewed the effort. While the end did not come easily for Rebecca West, it must have held some hope. One of her creations once said, "But, of course, death may be just what one has been waiting for; it may explain everything."  

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15 Walter Lippmann, "Mr. Wells Avoids Trouble," The New Republic 7 November 1914, 27.  
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