

# Rebecca West Today

Contemporary Critical Approaches

Edited by  
Bernard Schweizer



DELAWARE

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## Contents

Quick Guide to Discussions  
of Individual Works by West 7

Preface: Rebecca West's Politics:  
A Biographical Perspective  
CARL ROLLYSON 9

Introduction  
BERNARD SCHWEIZER 21

### *Part I. Historicist Analyses*

Rebecca West's Shadowy Other  
PHYLLIS LASSNER 43

Rebecca West in South Africa:  
The Limits of Liberalism  
LORETTA STEC 64

The Azev Affair and *The Birds Fall Down*:  
A True Story on a Parallel Universe?  
PETER G. CHRISTENSEN 80

### *Part II. Gender Studies*

Performing Women in *The Fountain Overflows*  
CHERYL A. WILSON 99

Cordelia and Mrs. Crosthwaite:  
An Unpublished Chapter of *This Real Night*  
ANN V. NORTON 112

Music and the Feminine Art of Detail in  
Rebecca West's *Harriet Hume*  
FRANCESCA FRIGERIO 125

*Part III. Issues in Aesthetics and Textuality*

Sheepish Modernism:

Rebecca West, the Adam Brothers,  
and the Taxonomies of Criticism

DEBRA RAE COHEN 143

Rebecca West, Aestheticism,  
and the Legacy of Oscar Wilde

MARGARET D. STETZ 157

Versions and Palimpsests:

Rebecca West's *The Sentinel*, *Adela*, and *The Judge*

KATHRYN LAING 170

*Part IV: Philosophical Approaches*

Renegotiating the Private and the Public Divide:

Reconsidering Rebecca West's *The Judge*

NANCY L. PAXTON 189

Rebecca West's "Strange Necessity:"  
Literature, Love, and the Good

NATTIE GOLUBOV 206

Rebecca West's Philosophy of History  
and the Critique of Postmodernism

BERNARD SCHWEIZER 223

Afterword: Unresolvable Pedagogy?

Teaching Rebecca West

BONNIE KIME SCOTT 245

*Appendixes*

Appendix 1: "Cordelia Chapter"

(omitted from *This Real Night*)

REBECCA WEST 261

Appendix 2: Notes on

Editing the "Cordelia Chapter"

ANN V. NORTON 310

Bibliography 313

Notes on Contributors 327

Index 331

Versions and Palimpsests:  
Rebecca West's  
*The Sentinel*, *Adela*,  
and *The Judge*

KATHRYN LAING

REBECCA WEST'S FIRST NOVEL, *THE SENTINEL*, WAS BEGUN IN 1909 BUT never completed.<sup>1</sup> After abandoning this feminist narrative of initiation and experience within a suffragette context, she began rewriting it as *Adela* (1912),<sup>2</sup> but this too was left unfinished and remained more a fragment than a fully realized version of *The Sentinel*.<sup>3</sup> In 1922 West published her second novel, *The Judge*,<sup>4</sup> in which, as I will show, she reworked and revised those much earlier and unfinished narratives. *The Sentinel*, the least known of the now considerable body of West's writing published posthumously, offers a richly textured account of the political, social, and cultural scene of turn-of-the-century Britain, as well as describing in horrifying detail some of the ordeals endured by the suffragettes. The novel also creates a startlingly fresh self-portrait of the young Rebecca and her circle. The historical period in which it is set remained a determining source, a "primordial soup," for West's enduring creative imagination, for she returned to this period repeatedly in her writing—in *Adela*, *The Judge* (1922), *The Birds Fall Down* (1966), *The Fountain Overflows* (1956), and, at the end of her life, *1900* (1982).

As Rebecca West's first fully fledged attempt at writing fiction, *The Sentinel* provides a rare and privileged glimpse into the genetic history of West's composition practice, an area of textual scholarship that has not yet been systematically applied to her large and varied oeuvre.<sup>5</sup> Models of intertextual readings of Virginia Woolf's novels and manuscripts, specifically arising from "the intersection of textual editing and feminist practice,"<sup>6</sup> offer an ideal framework for such an approach to West's

writing. As Brenda Silver has succinctly shown in her consideration of Woolf criticism and textual scholarship:

Once we are aware of the manuscript versions and their alternate readings, it becomes impossible, except by a willed act of commitment to a particular interpretative stance, not to be conscious of their presence within the "final" text. Once seen, once read, the words and the images found in the previous versions shadow and illuminate the impressions we receive from the familiar words on the well-thumbed page and create something new. And like all new works, the ones that emerged from the juxtaposition of the published and (previously) unpublished versions of Woolf's novels have created their own interpretative cruxes, including the vexed issue of self-censorship.<sup>7</sup>

The possibilities for interpretation, opened up by the various "archaeological projects" of feminist critics, editors, and textual critics that Silver outlines, are immense for West studies, too. As a way of approaching West's early writing, specifically in relation to *The Sentinel* as a source and template for her composition practice, concepts of "versions," "palimpsests," and "composite texts" become very helpful.

Susan Stanford Friedman's model of the "composite, palimpsestic text"<sup>8</sup> is especially apposite for a reading of West's writing, for it "brings together psychoanalysis (in particular Freud's writings on dream-work, narrative as disguise, and the role of the 'censor'), tenets of textual criticism (including 'versioning'), and feminist perspectives."<sup>9</sup> Friedman's premise that "narrative is a form of linguistic disguise—in Freud's terms, a manifest form that reveals latent and forbidden desire as a compromise between the conflicting needs of expression and repression," provides a means of analyzing the early drafts of "serial texts" of women's writing in particular.<sup>10</sup> She proposes reading women's narratives "psycho-politically" and seeing women's writing as "a trace, a web, a palimpsest, a rune, a disguise of what has not or cannot be spoken directly because of the external and internalized censors of patriarchal social order."<sup>11</sup> Earlier drafts of texts read intertextually are potentially the "textual unconscious" of the "final text," and "serial texts on related subjects and characters can be read "as a composite text whose parts are like the distinct but interconnecting layers of a palimpsestic psyche."<sup>12</sup>

Adapting Friedman's model by reading *The Sentinel*, *Adela*, and *The Judge* as versions or layers of a palimpsestic text, and including reference to her memoir *Family Memories*,<sup>13</sup> I will focus on West's shaping and reshaping of her feminist heroines and themes, specifically in relation to

her preoccupation with female innocence, sexuality, and motherhood in these narratives. This intertextual approach to her shifting portraits reveals both specific and more general insights into West's process of composition, self-censorship, and feminist transformations. Such an approach also opens up *The Judge*, in particular, to the possibility of new and unexpected interpretations, and intersects in productive ways with recent revisionist readings of this novel.

A brief outline of the three narratives will immediately reveal the interconnectedness of these texts. *The Sentinel* is divided into two parts, the shorter first part concentrating on the schoolgirl Adela Furnival and her seduction by an older man. The guilty memory of this incident haunts the more extensive second part, which explores the sexual, political, and social education of Adela ten years later. After becoming a science teacher she joins the suffragette movement, which introduces her to left-wing politics and militant feminism. Despite her attraction to the socialist politician Robert Langlad, Adela's sexual guilt and dedication to the feminist cause make a conventional romance ending for the novel impossible. Instead it breaks off suddenly with Adela seemingly destined to continue her self-sacrificing mission.

In the much shorter *Adela*, West begins to expand on part 1 of *The Sentinel*, fleshing it out further and to some extent making her heroine, still named Adela Furnival, a bolder and more precocious character. Angry and rebellious, schoolgirl Adela faces the prospect of having to give up her ambitions to study further because of family poverty. The visit to a wealthy relative's home, where she meets an attractive older man, is filled out in more detail and extended in this version, although the narrative ends abruptly again. *The Judge*, like *The Sentinel*, is divided into two parts, and West returns yet again to her story of a young woman whose ambitions to study have been thwarted by family poverty. Ellen Melville is a feisty suffragette, but her feminist ideals are endangered by her meeting with an older man, Richard Yaverland, and the death of her beloved mother, all in part 1. In the second part the story of Ellen Melville is subsumed into the melodramatic narrative of Marion Yaverland, Marion's traumatic experience of single motherhood, and her sons.<sup>14</sup>

Published in 1922, *The Judge* had a long period of gestation, having been conceived and begun as early as 1917, soon after the completion of West's first published novel, *The Return of the Soldier*. The first versions of *The Judge*, as West conceptualized and recorded them, contain traces of the earlier narratives—traces that emerge more fully in the final published text. The progress of these versions is plotted in a series of letters

to S. K. Ratcliffe, a fellow Fabian with whom West corresponded about personal and literary matters. In July 1917 she writes that book 1 of "The Judge" is completed and that "there will be at least 9 books."<sup>16</sup> Later that year she tells him that "The Judge will not be finished till the autumn, allowing for my slow rate. For see they have just got married, and her mother has to die, and his mother has to die, and he has to murder his brother and be hanged, and its really only *then* that exciting things begin to happen."<sup>16</sup> Victoria Glendinning notes H. G. Wells's irritation at "Rebecca's failure to stick to her original plan. The central figure, he knew, had been going to be a judge who collapsed in a brothel, recognizing in his seizure that the woman he is with is the wife of a man he sentenced for murder."<sup>17</sup> In the published novel, the brothel scene is replaced by a variation on the 1917 plan, involving marriage or pairing off, the death of the mothers, and the murder of a brother.

While West abandoned the plot that centered on a brothel,<sup>18</sup> she retained the figure of the judge, but in a subversive and unexpected representation—the role of judge, with all the associations of masculinity, authority, and control, is applied not only to a woman, but also to a mother. This gender reversal featured among the many grounds on which Wells attacked the novel. He claimed that West only kept the title *The Judge* "because that had been announced by her publisher for two years."<sup>19</sup> Glendinning, in sympathy with Wells's attack, suggests that the epigram of the novel—"Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father"—was used by West "to justify her now inapposite title."<sup>20</sup> These comments cannot be entirely dismissed, but they offer only a partial truth. The subversion of expectations implied by the title *The Judge* invokes, by association, that of the earlier novel, *The Sentinel*, releasing a concealed or even repressed context for *The Judge*. The title of *The Sentinel* encodes both male authority and female appropriation of that authority (suffragette militancy), as well as associations with conflicting views of female sexuality presented in the novel. The maternal judge who sentences her children is "a different surface of the palimpsest"<sup>21</sup> into which the story of the unchaste sentinel, Adela Furnival, erupts, offering a narrative that looks back to a period of feminist activism and also questions, and even indicts, the developing cult of motherhood of the postwar era.<sup>22</sup>

In later life, West never alluded to *The Sentinel*, effectively disguised by the pseudonym "Isabel Lancashire," nor to her attempt to revise the novel as *Adela*.<sup>23</sup> But she returned to these earliest narratives and fragments,<sup>24</sup> consciously or unconsciously, and rewrote them, many years later, into part 1 of *The Judge*. In the context of Friedman's model, then,

*The Sentinel* can be read as a "return of the repressed," situating *The Judge* in its immediate historical and literary context of the aftermath of the First World War, shellshock, and West's examination of this in *The Return of the Soldier*.<sup>25</sup> With its obvious Freudian overtones and its shellshocked soldier, *The Return of the Soldier* is, in part, preoccupied with the reasons for forgetting, Chris Baldry's "resolution not to know,"<sup>26</sup> and the need to remember, to recognise "that there is a draught that we must drink or not be fully human."<sup>27</sup> In a quite different way, *The Judge* is also about remembering: Marion, who remembers in her nightmares and in her sleeplessness her past experiences as a mistress, shamed unmarried mother, and victim of marital rape; Ellen, who remembers her dead mother and her mother's neglect at the hands of her father; Richard's memories of his mistress in South America and of his mother's memories; and West's own memories on which her novel is based. The strongly autobiographical dimension of the novel in its depiction of the suffragettes and of the larger-than-life Marion Yaverland has made it "an extraordinary personal document," suggesting that the novel is seminal to an understanding of West's writing.<sup>28</sup> If *The Judge* offers a version of self-analysis and self-revelation, then the insights it offers into West the writer, as well as into literary and sociopolitical contexts, must be intensified through an examination of what has been repressed—the narratives of *The Sentinel* and *Adela*, or at least remembered differently in textual terms.

All three narratives open with depictions of a restless heroine whose ambitions are frustrated, although in the more idealistic *Sentinel*, Adela does at least succeed in completing her studies. But in *Adela*, despite winning a scholarship, Adela faces the prospect of becoming a typist, ultimately the occupation of Ellen Melville in *The Judge*. Ellen's diminished prospects and extreme poverty (she misses a scholarship exam and she also lacks the wealthy relatives of the two Adelas), make her a much more vulnerable character than her predecessors. Her vulnerability is heightened by her own idealistic view of herself as a new kind of woman and by her ignorance and innocence. Innocence and purity were, for writers of New Woman fiction "synonymous for dangerous gaps in their knowledge concerning social, and in particular sexual, relations."<sup>29</sup> In this way, Ellen is deliberately portrayed as an archetypal heroine in the New Woman mode of the 1890s, and her innocence forms a striking contrast with that of her predecessors.<sup>30</sup>

The first book of *The Sentinel* is in part preoccupied with the shock of sexual awakening for the young Adela. Within these first few pages West exposes the dangers of ignorance imposed on women in the late-

Victorian/Edwardian period, the hypocrisy of that society, and the consequences of making sexuality a gender and class taboo. In her revised version, *Adela*, the heroine is more precocious, defiantly appreciating physical beauty and sexual attraction, and deploring the middle-class morality of her hometown, where "one was ashamed of one's most decent joys" (*Adela*, 47). Adela in *The Sentinel* learns to detest society's hypocrisy through her encounters with prostitutes and the childlike Rosie Essletree, imprisoned for killing her newborn baby. Ellen Melville in *The Judge* knows nothing of these things. She is a more androgynous figure than her passionate and sensuous predecessors, and emblemizes instead one of the icons of prewar feminism, Joan of Arc. Well versed in suffragette rhetoric on marriage and aware of the status quo of "one law for the man and another for the woman" (*Judge*, 137), she is ignorant about what lies at the heart of speeches on "the double standard of morality and the treatment of unmarried mothers" (*ibid.*, 57). Ellen is "the proverbial blank slate,"<sup>31</sup> disempowered by her poverty, her ignorance and her idealism.

West's insistence on Ellen's innocence is a strategy, then, a "site of transformation"<sup>32</sup> through which the earlier narratives are both repressed and remembered. This act of repressing and remembering is, according to Friedman, characteristic of revision in women's writing during the modern period. It involved "a sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious negotiation between the desire to speak and the need to repress what is forbidden in their narratives of modernity."<sup>33</sup> So the transformation of the two Adelas might be described as an act of disguise or self-censorship, similar, for example, to Virginia Woolf's transformation of Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out* (1915) from an outspoken feminist to a dreamy innocent.<sup>34</sup> West's portrayal of Ellen in part 1 of the novel can be seen in the same light as Woolf's reworking of her earlier drafts, which may have resulted from her sense that those drafts were too personal, too revealing. Adela's early sexual encounter (*The Sentinel*) is displaced onto the mother figure, Marion Yaverland, in *The Judge*. The close, quasi-homoerotic friendships between the suffragettes in *The Sentinel* are reinvented briefly in part 1 of *The Judge*, only to become deflected in the second part as Ellen becomes more and more isolated in relation to other women.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the fantasy of a hero such as Robert Langlad in *The Sentinel*, whose feminine qualities are appreciated as much as his masculinity, and whose sexual innocence is explored in some detail, provides a striking contrast with the more conventional Richard Yaverland. While West situates *The Judge* in an obvious autobiographical setting, suggesting that the narrative is more

"truthful," Ellen's innocence conceals the precocious, interrogative narratives and experienced heroines of *The Sentinel* and *Adela*.

This concealment might well be a form of self-censorship, or rather an act of self-defense. By making Ellen (an indisputably autobiographical figure) an innocent, her status as victim to larger cultural forces becomes more sharply defined. Ellen's innocence, the lost opportunities and experience that West was able to explore in *The Sentinel*, her elided radicalism and anger as portrayed in *Adela*, might then be seen as a loss on a textual level, too.<sup>36</sup> Reading the three texts in this way, Ellen's self-sacrifice into motherhood at the end of *The Judge* is a textual sacrifice on West's behalf. But self-censorship—and, by extension, self-defense—is only one way of reading the palimpsest. In her discussion of writers who return to the same narrative repeatedly, through drafts or variant texts, Friedman notes the way in which "[d]ifferent 'drafts' of a final text can be interpreted as 'repetitions' in which the author is 'working through' conflicts in an effort (conscious or unconscious) to move from 'repetition' to remembering."<sup>37</sup> While her account suggests that the earliest drafts or texts will be the most repressed, Friedman highlights the importance of "reading 'both ways,' instead of regarding the 'final' text as the endpoint and teleological goal of 'drafts,' or instead of reading texts solely as autonomous entities."<sup>38</sup>

West's conscious or unconscious return in *The Judge* to her earliest narratives comes with the passage of time—with the hindsight of the First World War and its consequences for the feminist movement, and with her own experience as a "New Woman" who has somehow succumbed to the conventional role of mother and mistress.<sup>39</sup> In rewriting this narrative, the older Rebecca West confronts her first literary persona and her earlier idealized self, as an act of nostalgia, irony and disillusionment. Ellen's naive feminism is gently satirized in the novel as much as the suffragettes she loves and admires, and she is portrayed in an ironic light from the outset. Her romantic yearning for adventure—"It's something more like the French Revolution I'm wanting" (*Judge*, 19)—makes her vulnerable to the romance of the books she reads and to the romance Richard Yaverland embodies. Ellen is similarly attracted to the heroic presence and narratives of the suffragettes: "Mrs. Ormiston, the mother of the famous rebels Brynhild, Melissa, and Guendolen, and herself a heroine, lifted a pale face where defiance dwelt among the remains of dark loveliness like a beacon lit on a grey castle keep" (*ibid.*, 50). Through Ellen's rapture, West recalls her own, unadulterated worship of the suffragette heroines evident in *The Sentinel*, a "constant spectacle of Beauty in Revolt" (*Sentinel*, 40), and evoked so vividly in the de-

scriptions of Psyche Charteris, that "implacable young warrior" (*ibid.*, 166).

Revising her earlier uncritical presentation of militant feminism in *The Sentinel*, West juxtaposes Ellen's enthusiasm for the suffragette speakers with Richard's more cynical response in *The Judge*. In contrast to Ellen's elated appreciation of the beautifully attired speakers, Richard is irritated by the dress code, which he sees as distracting and deluding. He rejects the message of the speech on immorality, seeing that "the spirit that makes people talk coarsely about sex is the same spirit that makes men act coarsely to women" (*Judge*, 66). West's own voice can be heard through Richard's musing, recalling her journalistic attacks, written before and during the First World War, on the excessive cultivation of femininity of the suffragettes, and the puritanism of suffragette rhetoric.<sup>40</sup>

These revisions of the earlier narratives—the insistence on Ellen's innocence, the sacrifice of an idealistic feminist narrative for Marion's story, and the dramatic exploration of meanings of motherhood—might read in one way as a textual loss, but *The Judge* can also be seen as an extraordinarily powerful extension of the preoccupation with ideologies of maternity already evident in *The Sentinel*. The concern with many kinds of mothering in this early novel—good and bad mothering, the despair of the single, unsupported mother imprisoned for killing her baby (Rosie Essletree), the joy of the suffragette whose skills at mothering are as focused and honed as her feminism (Leslie Macarthur)—becomes an all-consuming focus in *The Judge*.

In her analysis of draft or serial texts, Friedman invokes the repressed mother as metaphor for women's narrative. Extracting her metaphor from Freud's theory of dreams, Friedman discusses the significance of the maternal body as the irretrievable site of origins. "Freud's metaphor for the gap or knot in the dream-text and the text of dream interpretation privileges woman—specifically the maternal—as origin of what is censored, what is disguised in the grammar of the dream-work. Ultimately, his figurative formulation suggests the return of the repressed is the return of woman, of that mother/other, to him forever unknown, untranscribable, untranslatable."<sup>41</sup> Applying a similar analysis in her examination of the development of Joyce's *Stephen Hero* into *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Friedman traces the literal silencing of the mother in Joyce's texts, through "the erasure of her subjectivity, and the creation of the m/other who exists for and in the discourse of the son who thereby takes his place in the symbolic order of the father."<sup>42</sup> Considering the way in which *Portrait* enacts the censorship of "the mother

who knows and the lover who speaks" in *Stephen Hero*, Friedman suggests that this process, the process of "repression of the mother, of woman as subject," is emblematic not only of Joyce's modernism, but of male modernism as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

The application of this analysis to *The Judge* and its "draft" texts or earlier versions, *The Sentinel* and *Adela*, reveals a process that is the very reverse of Joyce's, and anticipates in this context the emergence of a different "female modernist" form in West's writing. In *The Judge*, West foregrounds motherhood as a theme and a conundrum; she gives a voice to the mother. The preoccupation with the maternal and with origins was one West shared with many other contemporary women writers, who repeatedly turned back "to the earliest period of life, as though to articulate a story of origins which would recognize the authority of the mother as well as the father. The 'mother/daughter' plot . . . thus becomes a key thematic and structural principle in modernist women's writing."<sup>44</sup>

In *The Sentinel*, Adela Furnival is an orphan, and familial influences and pressures are deflected onto relatives who represent views against which Adela positions herself. The absence of the mother in this highly autobiographical text is, in one sense, a liberating strategy. The presence of the mother in the text would perhaps have enforced some kind of censorship, not only on the activities of Adela Furnival, but also on the writer herself. While the mother is absent, a preoccupation with motherhood as an ideology is reflected through the various versions of maternity offered. The suffragettes Adela encounters become, in fact, alternative types of mothers, literally and figuratively, who take the place of the absent mother. In revising *The Sentinel* as *Adela*, West changes the orphan status of her heroine and creates parents who are at once highly autobiographical and also caricatures of West's own family. Mrs. Furnival is so downtrodden, both by her brother and by her husband, who has abandoned his wife and daughter to ignominious poverty, that she epitomizes archetypal feminine victimization.

The absent mother in *The Sentinel* is replaced by the gentle, but broken and helpless, Mrs. Furnival in *Adela*. Mrs. Furnival is neither central nor completely marginal in this fragment, and traces of her remain in West's much more sympathetic portrait of Ellen's mother in *The Judge*. Mrs. Melville is as fragile and as weakened by her harsh experiences at the hands of a feckless husband as Mrs. Furnival, but Ellen's memories of their shared experiences and of her former beauty restore to her a strength and dignity her predecessor lacked. The angry representations of the mother by the younger writer, either as absolute

absence or as caricature, are redrawn with compassionate and identifying hindsight.<sup>45</sup>

In *The Judge*, motherhood becomes a central theme, initiated by the epigraph and followed through the variety of mothers and stories about mothers narrated. For example, Mrs. Ormiston, a suffragette leader and inspiring speaker, is also "one of those tragically serious mothers in whose souls perpetual concern for their children dwelt like a cloud" (*Judge*, 61), while Mrs. Melville has had her vitality and loveliness crushed out of her through the death of her sons and the desertion of her husband. Stories are also told of a mother whose baby has died (*ibid.*, 251), of unmarried mothers in general and of Roger's fiancée, who, Marion suggests, has recently had a child (*ibid.*, 395), and, most powerfully, of Marion Yaverland herself. These stories, especially those of Mrs. Melville and Marion Yaverland, gradually replace the suffragette story, as Ellen loses her mother and becomes absorbed into Marion's story.

There is another "text," embedded in the various stories and ideas about motherhood, that emerges through *The Sentinel/Judge* narrative. This is the story of West's mother, Isabella Fairfield, which underlies the narrative of *The Sentinel* and which becomes more insistent in *The Judge*, as West merges her own story of motherhood with that of her mother. In *The Sentinel*, West's mother's family background provides a source for the plot. Adela's relatives are involved in manufacturing in the Manchester area, with particular interests in textiles and the lace industry. Isabella Fairfield's maternal grandfather was "a prosperous lace merchant," and Isabella's mother ended up managing a lace shop in Edinburgh.<sup>46</sup>

In this first novel, the young Rebecca weaves a socialist and feminist narrative around a familial history, prompting commentary on sweatshop labor, the poor payment of women, and prostitution. She maintains the family background of the textile industry in *Adela*. Drawing on her mother's stories and on those of suffragette friends and acquaintances as a framework, West the novice writer constructs a tale around an idealized heroine and a projected future self. In *The Judge*, the mother's stories, and the story of the mother are even more evident in a narrative that not only becomes a quest for an understanding of motherhood, but a quest for meaning in relation to West's own story of maternity. Through these layers of narrative, West dramatizes the mythic, archetypal, and social constructions of the mother. To adopt the language suggested by the title, West puts the ideologies of motherhood on trial.



In part 1, the story of Mrs. Melville is an adaptation and embellishment of the story of Isabella Fairfield, abandoned, widowed, and reduced to abject poverty and finally death. In part 2, West turns to the stories her mother had told her about her youth and the matriarchy that sustained and perhaps contributed to her later difficulties. *Family Memories*, West's reminiscences, tells a tale both of female resourcefulness and strength and of the sometimes perilous power women wield over other women.<sup>47</sup> Isabella's mother and her sister, Aunt Isa, hold the family together, but do so at the cost of Isabella's own future in *Family Memories*. After the death of her husband, Isabella's mother opens a lace shop, provoking her family's disapproval. In defiance of the family, one of her sisters comes to live with the family. "It is a beautiful drama of sisterly love, but unfortunately the heroine was badly cast. She was a hunchback, but that could not excuse her . . . Aunt Isa was eternally critical but made nonsense of criticism, for with her the process never led to praise. There was no alternative but blame. No phenomenon could be analysed and valued; each and all were prisoners in the dock, and guilty (*Family Memories*, 26).

Isabella, unmarried, without prospect of a real career because she is a woman, has her life shaped and reshaped by her mother and aunt. West writes of her mother's "blinding rage at this offhand disposal of her future" when she was sent away from home to be a "musical governess" (ibid., 109), and later, when Isabella is sent to Australia to trace her brother, West writes: "My grandmother then unfolded a plan which I find it shocking to contemplate: a quite reckless disposition of a young woman's life" (ibid., 121). In both of these instances, however, West considers the forces shaping the older women's decisions about Isabella's future, highlighting the fact that negative female power can in turn be seen as a consequence of the misogynist ideologies of patriarchal Victorian society.

In *The Judge*, a much earlier adaptation of Isabella's story emerges in the form of Marion's experiences of betrayal, not only by her lover, but by her grandmother and aunt, too. Responding to the scandal of Marion's illegitimate pregnancy, her grandmother and Aunt Alphonsine propose that Marion should marry Peacy, her lover's butler. Following this act of coercion and conformity to society's norms, both aunt and grandmother collude unwittingly in Peacy's rape of Marion. As extreme versions of Isabella's mother and aunt, Marion's relatives, governed by social conventions and distortions themselves, perpetuate these through their treatment of Marion. The grandmother, who has been disappointed in marriage, has a "theory of the sanctity of marriage. . . . It

comforted her to believe that by merely being a wife she had fulfilled a function pleasing to God and necessary to the existence of society" (*Judge*, 225). Aunt Alphonsine who is disfigured (like her real-life counterpart, Aunt Isa), bitter, and dedicated "to the ridiculous god of decorum" (ibid., 226), is made "the most responsible for the defeat of Marion's life" (ibid., 225). Following the rape, Marion gives birth to Roger, and it is his existence, as much as Richard's, that brings destruction in such melodramatic fashion to Yaverland's End.

Thus, the various layers of narratives about mothers in the earlier versions, West's own autobiographical story of single motherhood, her mother's stories, and pre- and postwar feminist constructions of maternity constitute a complex web in *The Judge*. The embedded layer of family narratives, written down as family memoirs at the end of her life but already present in her earliest fiction, is a literal dramatization of the need to read this novel (and, indeed, other West texts) both ways. Each way of reading *The Judge* and its palimpsestic layers of maternal narratives one way reveals a very different version of Virginia Woolf's dictum of "thinking back through our mothers."<sup>48</sup> Thinking back through our mothers in anger, perhaps, West's texts reveal a destructive legacy that, on one level, seems doomed to repetition by the end of the novel when Ellen imagines her own fate as a single mother. At the same time, this thinking back in anger might be seen as cathartic. The shading out of the more precocious, experienced, and indeed angry heroines of *The Sentinel* and *Adela* for the innocent and idealistic Ellen makes way instead for an angry narrative against contemporary ideologies of maternity and gives a voice of anger to mothers. Read both ways, West's texts enact a rehearsal of maternal narratives, both as a search for sources, textual and thematic, and as an act of purgation. Exhuming the old narratives offers the possibility of writing new ones.

The endings, or nonendings, of these texts dramatize not only the ambivalences and possibilities of a palimpsestic reading, but also the idea that texts are unstable, that they are processes rather than fixed and final products.<sup>49</sup> *The Sentinel* ends abruptly, in midflow, with Adela anticipating her self-sacrifice for a feminist cause. *The Judge* ends ambiguously, with Ellen's willing unwillingness to sacrifice herself by becoming a mother. The textual loss of the theme of feminist self-sacrifice for maternal self-sacrifice reinforces critical readings of *The Judge* as allegorical of first- and second-wave feminism, and of "West's disappointment with the legacy of sexual liberation and her ambivalence about motherhood."<sup>50</sup> Reading these unfinished texts both ways and as unfinished revisions or endings that are really beginnings highlights

the emergence of what becomes a distinctive compositional feature of West's oeuvre.<sup>51</sup> The concept of the palimpsestic text offers multiple interpretative possibilities for West's earliest writing—*The Sentinel*, *Adela*, *The Judge*. But the models of interpretation that have evolved and that are still evolving from the “intersection of textual editing and feminist studies,”<sup>52</sup> provide a new and rich resource for understanding a writer whose work has always posed difficulties by its very variety and breadth.

## NOTES

1. Rebecca West, *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel by Rebecca West*, ed. Kathryn Laing (Oxford: Legenda, 2002). All subsequent quotations from *The Sentinel* are from this edition.
2. Rebecca West, *Adela*, in *The Only Poet and Short Stories*, ed. Antonia Till (London: Virago, 1992). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.
3. The proposed dates of composition of *The Sentinel* and *Adela* in any edition may need revising since Victoria Glendinning's recent suggestion that *Adela* was written as late as 1914, contemporaneously with the short story “Indissoluble Matrimony.” See Victoria Glendinning, “Seeds of Success,” review of *The Sentinel: An Incomplete Early Novel by Rebecca West*, ed. Kathryn Laing, *Guardian Review*, December 20, 2003, 27.
4. Rebecca West, *The Judge* (London: Virago, 1993). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.
5. For the first full application of a genetic approach to West's work, see Bernard Schweizer, “Survivors in Mexico’: Genesis of an Epic Fragment,” in *Rebecca West: Heroism, Rebellion, and the Female Epic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002). See also Schweizer's “Genesis of a ‘might-have-been masterpiece’: Rebecca West's ‘Survivors in Mexico,’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 24, no. 2 (Winter 2000–2001): 251–69, and Schweizer, introduction to *Survivors in Mexico*, by Rebecca West (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), xxv–xxx. Other work on West's manuscripts shows a significant move in the direction of genetic criticism, for example, Lynette Felber, “Unfinished Business and Self-Memorialization: Rebecca West's Aborted Novel, *Mild Silver, Furious Gold*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 2 (Winter 2001–2): 38–49; and Norton's essay in this volume.
6. Brenda Silver, “Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice: Or, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf Part II,” in *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, ed. George Bornstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 195.
7. *Ibid.*, 194–95.
8. Susan Stanford Friedman, “The Return of the Repressed in Women's Narrative,” *Journal of Narrative Technique* 19 (Winter 1989): 141–56.
9. Silver, “Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice,” 206.
10. Friedman, “Return,” 142.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*

13. West's reminiscences were published posthumously in *Family Memories*, written on and off “for the last two decades of her life.” *Family Memories: An Autobiographical Journey*, ed. Faith Evans (London: Virago, 1987), 1. Ann Norton has shown in “Rebecca West's Ironic Heroine: Beauty as Tragedy in *The Judge*,” how the reminiscences in *Family Memories* are embedded in the narrative of *The Judge*; but (as we shall see later in this essay) they emerge even earlier in *The Sentinel* and *Adela*, where Isabella Fairfield's family background provides some of the sources for the plot and setting. *Family Memories* can in fact be read as another layer in the “composite text” that is *The Sentinel/Judge* narrative. All subsequent quotations from *Family Memories* will be based on the Virago edition.

14. This double structure, first used in *The Sentinel*, offers insights into West's earliest formulations of the dialogic in her writing. Recent feminist scholarship has begun to focus on this. For example, see Diana Wallace's useful dialogic reading of *The Judge*, showing how West “presents us with two fully-realised female consciousnesses—the two Books of the texts offer a dialogue between the two voices, each colouring the other” (Wallace, *Sisters and Rivals in British Women's Fiction, 1914–39*, 114).

15. Unpublished letter to S. K. Ratcliffe (McFarlin Special Collections Library, University of Tulsa), 14.664.

16. Bonnie Kime Scott, ed. *Selected Letters of Rebecca West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 34.

17. Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West* (London: Papermac, 1988), 80–81.

18. West does not, however, discard the idea of the brothel and its associations completely. In part 1 Ellen, while attending court because poverty and illness had prevented her mother from paying the rent, meets her future employer, who has been involved in a case concerning a brothel. The implied connections between Ellen's vulnerability and prostitution are not coincidental; they are made several times in the novel.

19. Quoted in Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 81.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Friedman, “Return,” 148.

22. See Shirley Peterson's, “Modernism, Single Motherhood, and the Discourse of Women's Liberation in Rebecca West's *The Judge*,” in *Unmanaging Modernism: Gendered Re-Readings*, eds. Lorelee Macpike, Maria Flawley, Elizabeth Jane Harrison, and others (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 105–16, for a persuasive reading of the novel as an expression of the anxieties of postwar female liberation and the split between old and new feminism over motherhood.

23. Isabel Lancashire is one of West's earliest pseudonyms. For more details about the name, see Laing, introduction to West, *Sentinel*, iii.

24. The “Ellen Yaverland” fragment in the same manuscript notebook as “Indissoluble Matrimony” is another version (McFarlin Special Collections, University of Tulsa).

25. Friedman focuses her model of “the return of the repressed” on three texts by H.D. that are shown to be acts of self-analysis and self-healing (Friedman, “Return,” 147).

26. Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 1980), 138–39.

27. *Ibid.*, 182.

28. J. R. Hammond, *H. G. Wells and Rebecca West* (Hemel Hempstead, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 128.

29. Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 294.

30. See Lynn Pykett, "Writing around Modernism: May Sinclair and Rebecca West," in *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900-1950*, ed. Lynne Hapgood and Nancy Paxton (London: Macmillan, 2000), 117.

31. Ann V. Norton, "Rebecca West's Ironic Heroine," *ELT* 34, no. 3 (1991): 306. As Norton suggests, Ellen's innocence and vulnerability also characterize her as "a Gothic (or romance) heroine" (*ibid.*, 302). See also Philip Ray, "The Judge Reexamined: Rebecca West's Underrated Gothic Romance," *ELT* 33, no. 3 (1988): 297-307.

32. Friedman, "Return," 148.

33. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Spatialization, Narrative Theory, and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*," in *Ambiguous Discourses: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 126.

34. See Silver, "Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice," 214, for an outline of critical scholarship on the early versions of *The Voyage Out*.

35. "Ellen sublimates any growing sexual desire into quasi-erotic passions for other women, present and past" (Peterson, "Modernism, Single Motherhood," 108).

36. "One of the major concerns framing and framed by the feminist contributions to 'versioning' was anger" (Silver, "Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice," 210). In the context of Woolf studies and issues of self-censorship and self-editing, what was lost in the revisions of her novels was "the explicitness of Woolf's cultural critique, including her expression of anger" (*ibid.*).

37. Friedman, "Return," 146.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Ellen and Marion can be seen as "allegorical figures of the women's movement itself as it undergoes a generational change" (Peterson, "Modernism, Single Motherhood," 111).

40. See Jane Marcus, *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

41. Friedman, "Return," 142.

42. Susan Stanford Friedman, "(Self)Censorship and the Making of Joyce's Modernism," in *Joyce: The Return of the Repressed*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 35.

43. *Ibid.*, 41.

44. Clare Hanson, "Looking Within: Women's Writing in the Modernist Period, 1910-40," in *An Introduction to Women's Writing from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, ed. Marion Shaw (London: Prentice Hall, 1998), 215.

45. West dedicated *The Judge* to her mother who died in 1921 (Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 75).

46. *Ibid.*, 13.

47. West's "concern with gender and with how sexual difference not only affects relations between men and women but casts a shadow between women," is a constant theme in her writing (Wallace, *Sisters and Rivals*, 116).

48. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), 101.

49. Jerome McGann's concept of the "unstable text" has been particularly influential on the work of textual and feminist critics alike. See Silver on McGann ("Textual

Criticism as Feminist Practice," 216); and McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

50. Peterson, "Modernism, Single Motherhood," 114.

51. West's composition method of "threading" and "layering" that Bernard Schweizer identifies in his analysis of her final and, yet again, unfinished work, *Survivors in Mexico*, provides another vivid example of this ("Survivors in Mexico: Genesis of an Epic Fragment," 100).

52. Silver, "Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice," 195.