

The Sentinel

An Incomplete Early Novel
by *Rebecca West*



EDITED BY KATHRYN LAING



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CONTENTS



Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction	xiii
Note on the Manuscript	liv
Note on the Text	lviii
List of Amended Word Divisions	lxii
Chronology	lxiv
Select Bibliography	lxviii
THE SENTINEL	
Book I	3
Book II	25
Book III	251
Explanatory Notes	253
Appendix: Textual Fragments	275

INTRODUCTION



And when the Suffragette went out by the door the stones
began to come through the window.

The Sentinel, 223

A Recovered Manuscript

The manuscript consisted of four school notebooks with the title and author, *The Sentinel* by Isabel Lancashire, written at the top of the first page of the second notebook (the front covers of all four books were missing). It had been attributed to 'Mabel Lancashire' in the catalogue for the Rebecca West Collection, University of Tulsa, and was filed in the correspondence section. At first glance it seemed likely that the manuscript had formed part of an exchange between West and the unknown Isabel Lancashire, for the collection contains so many letters from an array of correspondents both famous and forgotten. Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Anaïs Nin are just a few of the names that catch the eye. In search of material relating to the *Ladies Home Journal* and its publication of writing by both West and Isak Dinesen, I was struck by the incongruity of finding the substantial manuscript of a novel filed amongst these various correspondents. The manuscript looked old and was disintegrating in places. It was written in ink on pages that had become thin and crisp with time, and in a hand that was distinctly familiar.

*The Sentinel*¹ was immediately compelling, initially for its resonances with some of Rebecca West's earliest writing. The subject matter and the heroine's name coincided with the unfinished piece *Adela*, attributed to West and published posthumously.² These were the first clues to the real identity of the author, the date when it was written and why the manuscript was in the collection at all, albeit in the incorrect section. West referred to neither *Adela* nor *The Sentinel* in her later writing or correspondence, although both manuscripts had been preserved and retained in the collection of her papers purchased after her death by the

University of Tulsa in 1986. In the process of packing and sorting the papers before their removal to Tulsa, *Adela* had been identified as written by West. *The Sentinel* had somehow been passed over and was soon lost in the vast collection that includes correspondence, manuscripts of novels, articles and reviews, photographs and much more. Disguised by the name Isabel Lancashire and further concealed as 'Mabel Lancashire', the novel had completely disappeared. Was Isabel Lancashire really Rebecca West? When was the novel written? How did it fit into West's literary career overall, and what was its significance? Some answers lay in the fragments of early writing in other school notebooks in the collection and in early letters, in terms both of subject matter and of palaeography.³ Other answers lay in the narrative of *The Sentinel* itself. The distinct autobiographical references, the feminist agenda, the extraordinary ambition of its subject seemed vintage Rebecca West. And there was more. This lengthy manuscript, running to over 260 pages, appeared to be her very first full-length novel. As the process of identifying and dating the novel progressed,⁴ it became apparent that this was an astonishing early work, containing the seeds of almost everything West was to write over her long and successful career.

The story of Adela Furnival in *The Sentinel*, a restless 16-year-old and later a 26-year-old suffragette, marks a crucial conjunction of personal and public history. In 1909, or more likely 1910, Cicely Isabel Fairfield,⁵ alias Isabel Lancashire, 'féministe enragée'⁶ and involved member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), began writing but never completed her novel about sex, politics and growing up. It is set in the context of early twentieth-century feminist demands for votes for women and the then Liberal Government's policies towards these demands.⁷ Within this broad political context a variety of other contemporary debates are introduced, such as the nature of womanliness, prostitution, motherhood and current scientific views on these matters. Descriptions of popular culture (a religious revival, musicals, music halls and male impersonation), as well as discussions about the education system, the Russian Revolution, vegetarianism and more, find their way into this all-embracing novel. The year 1909 saw not only the continuation of suffragette imprisonment for militant acts by the government, but also the brutal response to their new strategy of the hunger strike—forcible feeding. The novel is in one sense a passionate and unrestrained response to these events, celebrating the beauty and courage of suffragette heroines and portraying with unprecedented realism, by

drawing directly on documentary evidence, the horror of what they endured. For example, Adela, in prison for militancy, is handcuffed so that 'her hands were swollen like bladders' (*Sentinel*, 237) and she is forcibly fed until she is sick. The doctor 'alarmed by an excessive vomiting, [...] withdrew the tube. She felt as if the upper part of her chest and the back of her throat were being dragged out with it' (*Sentinel*, 236). Shocking for its uncensored descriptions of the brute physicality of the suffragette body in pain following assaults, imprisonment and forcible feeding,⁸ the novel is striking for other reasons too. Drawing on the hotly contested debates about women and female sexuality, already voiced in the New Woman novel and contemporary pseudo-scientific discourses, West writes with an extraordinary candour about the confusing power of sexual desire. Adela's seduction as a schoolgirl in the first section of the novel is described as 'an animal craving' (*Sentinel*, 23), distinct from her later overwhelming but suppressed desire for Robert Langlad, and her homoerotic friendship with the suffragette Psyche Charteris is explored in a surprisingly uninhibited manner for a text of this era: 'Psyche's scarlet lips smiled dreamily, her brilliant eyes sought the distant sky; she exclaimed with amorous intensity—"I love women! Don't you?"' (*Sentinel*, 217). The rawness of the prose in its description of violence done to women and in its attempt to write openly about sex, both in the contexts of prostitution, seduction and requited love, might be seen as one of the aesthetic failings of the novel; it is also part of its distinctiveness and newness, its power to shock, surprise and intrigue.

West's concern with aesthetics is as central to the novel as sex and violence. Early on in the narrative the 'new poetry' is compared with the woman's movement: 'As the poetry of this age is divested of "poetical devices and conceits" [...] so is this Movement [...] heroic' (*Sentinel*, 48). The celebration of the revolutionary nature of both is also a celebration of modernity and the possibilities it held for both art and feminism. And West's representation of modernity through the figure of the suffragette and the suffrage movement anticipates a key preoccupation in modernist writing.⁹ West's juxtaposition of poetry and feminist revolution also reveals her desire, maintained throughout her career, to combine a political agenda with an aesthetic one. This desire was first realized through her discovery of a public voice via her journalism. The novel's sustained commentary on contemporary fiction, drama, newspapers and art reveals the earnest yet often

impatient voice of the apprentice novelist, who, in this case, overturns conventions as quickly as she uses them.¹⁰

Dissatisfied with *The Sentinel*, West abandoned it and began rewriting the novel as *Adela*, but this too she abandoned around the time she started contributing to the radical feminist magazine *The Freewoman*.¹¹ Lost in the archive, *The Sentinel* concealed an essential fragment of biographical information and literary history. Its reappearance provides the missing link in the study of Rebecca West's early journalism and fiction, connecting the two and anticipating recurring themes and preoccupations in her later fiction, especially in *The Judge* (1922). Its encyclopaedic range of references, its ambitious undertaking to capture the whole of a significant period of personal and public history, epitomizes Rebecca West's entire *œuvre*. This is a manuscript, a work in progress that was abandoned in its existing state but returned to in different texts and through different modes of writing, offering readers a key, not only to the developing trajectory of West's early writing but to its cultural moment as a whole.

Who was Cicely Isabel Fairfield, alias Isabel Lancashire, alias Rebecca West?

After Charles Fairfield abandoned his family in 1902, his wife, Isabella Fairfield, moved with her three daughters, Letitia, Winifred and Cicely, to Edinburgh, settling there until 1910. During this period the young Cicely, rebellious feminist and socialist, joined with her older sisters the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903 in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel. She published her first feminist text as a schoolgirl—a letter to *The Scotsman* written when she was 14, in which she considered 'the profound national effects of the subjection of women on the nation'.¹² Several surviving letters to her sister Lettie record various suffragette speakers she has heard at meetings and describe the violent clashes between suffragettes and the police. She also notes her own participation in the action: 'On Thursday I stood outside the poll at Forsyth Rd and shouted "Keep the Liberal Out"'.¹³ There are regular references to her by name in the WSPU publication, *Votes for Women*¹⁴—for example, the 25 June 1909 edition specifically states that there has been an increase of sales of *Votes for Women* due to the efforts of Miss Fairfield and others.¹⁵ Her involvement in the movement extended beyond Edinburgh to Harrogate and Newcastle,

and included meeting prominent suffragette speakers such as Christabel Pankhurst and Mary Gawthorpe.¹⁶

West's active involvement in the WSPU ended when at 17 she left Edinburgh for London, to take up a place at the Academy of Dramatic Art. The Fairfield family moved back to London in 1910 to live at 10 Chatham Close, Hampstead Garden Suburb. Following her eldest sister, Lettie, who had joined the Fabian Women's Group as soon as the family moved to London, West also became a Fabian.¹⁷ In 1911 she abandoned her hopes of becoming an actress, leaving the academy before the course had ended, and took up writing 'without meaning to do so'.¹⁸ She began with some chance drama reviews for the London *Evening Standard* and soon found her *métier* as a contributor to Dora Marsden's newly created *Freewoman* magazine in 1911. She developed a style in her writing for *The Freewoman* that earned her notoriety as well as fame, and this was soon cemented by her choice of pen-name—that of the heroine of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, Rebecca West.¹⁹ Irreverent and witty, she gained the attention of a variety of leading political and literary figures.²⁰ The story of her meeting with H. G. Wells in 1912 after the publication of her provocative review of his novel, *Marriage*, in *The Freewoman*; her subsequent affair with him, pregnancy and struggle to maintain her literary and journalistic ambitions, are well known. Attaining a public voice had a major impact on West's personal life and on the fiction and journalism she was soon to publish.

West's long and prolific career as a journalist and, to a lesser extent, as a novelist, her complex personal life and her later role as *grande dame* of letters have been well documented in two biographies by Victoria Glendinning and Carl Rollyson. Her early journalism was collected and published during her lifetime (*The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West 1911–1917*, edited by Jane Marcus)²¹ and a selection of the vast body of her correspondence was published in 2000 (*Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott). *The Sentinel*, written during, and in part about, the Edinburgh and early London years, provides a far more detailed portrait of Cicely Isabel Fairfield before she became Rebecca West than has hitherto emerged, crucially supplementing the existing biographies and surviving letters dating from that period.²²

Writing *The Sentinel*

The shorter first section of *The Sentinel* (Book I), introducing the younger Adela Furnival, begins with a plot that mixes fantasy and family history,²³ while the main body of the novel (Books II and III) has its origins in the history of early twentieth-century feminism. Its particular focus is the WSPU and the young Rebecca's involvement and committed interest in the ideals of the movement. There were two central women's societies growing to prominence at this time: the WSPU, whose members became known as militants or suffragettes, and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), whose members were non-militant and became known as the 'constitutionalists' or 'social feminists'. Both movements were composed of smaller groups and breakaway groups and they shared common characteristics and aims, affiliations with the working class, for example, and the demand for votes for women. They were divided on several issues: the importance of gaining the vote, the methods of attaining it and the kind of position women should find in society. The WSPU espoused the idea of equal rights for women, to be achieved through militant action if necessary, whilst the non-militant NUWSS accepted the notion of a 'separate sphere' for women, that is the private or domestic sphere, but argued for political rights and representation for their particular roles in society.²⁴

West's experiences as a member of the WSPU in Edinburgh were formative ones, providing some of the primary material for *The Sentinel*. Some of Adela's experiences re-enact West's own feminist activism, recorded in her letters to Letitia Fairfield and in the brief *Votes for Women* articles. Later, in *The Judge* (1922), West created an even more autobiographical heroine, the Edinburgh suffragette Ellen Melville, who sells *Votes for Women* every Saturday afternoon:

This street-selling had always been a martyrdom to her proud spirit, for it was one of the least of her demands upon the universe that she should be well thought of eternally and by everyone; but she had hitherto been sustained by the reflection that while there were women in jail, as there were always in those days, it ill became her to mind because Lady Cumnock [...] laughed down her long nose as she went by. (*The Judge*, 45)

West's commitment to the WSPU also partially explains her choice of the name Isabel Lancashire as a pseudonym. Isabel was her own middle name and her mother's name was Isabella. Lancashire as a county had numerous feminist associations during that period, most

importantly the founding of the WSPU in Manchester, at that time in the county of Lancashire. It was in Manchester that Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney first interrupted a Liberal Meeting and were thrown out, and the militant activities of the WSPU first began.²⁵ West's choice of 'Lancashire' highlights her youthful identification with Mrs Pankhurst and the militant feminist movement of the time, and this identification is reinforced by her choosing Lancashire as the central setting for both *The Sentinel* and *Adela*. Manchester and other surrounding towns, fictional and real, feature in both novels. 'Isabel Lancashire', with its personal and political associations, was one of West's first literary identities,²⁶ alerting us to the importance of names in her early writing as well as gesturing towards some of the autobiographical sources of the text.

While *The Sentinel* derives in part from West's personal experiences and commitments, it is not merely autobiographical. It also offers a series of biographical accounts, of thinly disguised portraits of West's sisters and of particular suffragettes whom she greatly admired. Both Winifred and Letitia Fairfield were fully involved in suffrage work and Lettie was a prominent figure in the movement, although this fact is rarely mentioned in modern accounts of the period.²⁷ Lettie, already a qualified doctor, lived in Manchester for a while, working at 'the very small Jewish hospital there, an excellent little hospital where I got a lot of valuable experience, and there I had joined up with the residue of the Women's Social and Political Union [...] that Mrs Pankhurst and her daughters left behind when they went to London'.²⁸ During the year 1908 and part of 1909, Lettie was regularly listed as a speaker in Manchester in the WSPU paper, *Votes for Women*. West joined her sister in Manchester for at least one weekend, a visit she alludes to indirectly in a postcard to Lettie in 1911²⁹ and many years later in an interview.³⁰ Lettie's reminiscences of this period give some idea of the first-hand experience West may have gained of campaigning in Manchester, and offer a clue to the sources of Adela's similar experiences in the novel. These reminiscences include a description of how she would 'dash down to the arranged site which would be in one of the many vacant building lots in a nearby slum district' after a day's work in the hospital, and there 'we would have a small banner or something of the sort just saying who we were—and if there'd been militancy in London or somewhere we reckoned on having a very noisy reception'.³¹

Her own as well as her sister's extensive experience of the city

partially explain the centrality of Manchester and the Midlands in her early fiction both in *The Sentinel* and *Adela*. In the earlier novel, Letitia Fairfield was the young Rebecca's model, and much of her inspiration and information came from her:³² 'Lettie proved more of an education for Rebecca than any formal school training. She was the trailblazer'.³³ She also introduced West to the suffragette speaker and political organizer, Mary Gawthorpe. Gawthorpe became one of West's 'romantic heroines',³⁴ and her magnetic personality and varied suffragette experiences provided another model and potential plot for *The Sentinel*.³⁵ The influence of Letitia Fairfield and Mary Gawthorpe is obvious; as a hardworking science student at school and aspiring schoolmistress, Adela is modelled on Letitia Fairfield's scientific ambitions and on the schoolmistress-turned-suffragette career of Mary Gawthorpe, rather than on West's own school experiences and ambition to become an actress.

Mary Gawthorpe was also clearly an important inspiration for the character Mary Gerald, who welcomes Adela into the movement. Descriptions of her early on in *The Sentinel* as 'a little woman, gay with red cheeks and dancing hazel eyes' and brown hair and later as 'this bright little elfin thing small and gay as some vivacious insect' (*Sentinel*, 25) reflect Lettie's enthusiastic portraits and West's impressions as recorded in her letters. Lettie remembered her as

like a little fairy—tiny little thing, very dainty [...] she must have been a very good schoolteacher because she'd a wonderful gift of exposition. She was an extremely attractive speaker, she was very witty and humorous [...] nearly all the mythical hecklings, you know, [...] really originated with Mary Gawthorpe, and the way she could win a crowd over, a riotous and hostile crowd, was simply marvellous, and Mary Gawthorpe and I made great friends.³⁶

In 1908, West writes to Lettie, describing Miss Gawthorpe's disturbing influence at a suffrage meeting: 'She is a very witty speaker and really rather logical in spite of her wild tendency to say the most unexpected thing possible. Her looks carry her everywhere—she has such pretty brown hair and blue eyes and a marvellously perfect mouth'.³⁷ Mary Gerald is the first of numerous fictionalized versions of prominent suffragette figures in the novel, the *roman à clef* convention being typical of most novels that treat women's suffrage as a central theme at the time.³⁸ In *The Sentinel*, the indomitable leaders of the WSPU, Mrs Pankhurst and her eldest daughter, Christabel,

appear in the personages of Mrs Charteris and Britomart.³⁹ In West's narrative, however, Mrs Pankhurst and Christabel, or their fictional counterparts, remain relatively remote figures. It is Psyche⁴⁰ Charteris who becomes important to Adela, although her characterization does not seem to be borrowed from either of the younger Pankhurst sisters, Sylvia or Adela. Instead, Psyche seems an amalgamation of the most striking qualities of the suffragettes West knew or had read about. Psyche's 'faery, grotesque beauty' (*Sentinel*, 161) recalls West's and Lettie's description of Mary Gawthorpe and West's memory of Christabel, 'whose beauty and grace could not be imagined'.⁴¹ But the militant activism Psyche describes for Adela when they first meet (the interruption of the Premier in the Grand Theatre (*Sentinel*, 163), for example), and the acts of sabotage and disruption that she and Adela undertake together later, the attack on the President of the Board of Trade and their subsequent imprisonment and forcible feeding, appear to be based on incidents that closely reflect the experiences of suffragettes like Dora Marsden and Emily Wilding Davison.⁴² Leslie Macarthur, the suffragette Adela meets during her first imprisonment, appears to be modelled on Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence who, as treasurer, was an important member of the WSPU leadership. She was also, with her husband, co-editor of the WSPU publication *Votes for Women*. Leslie Macarthur, with her husband, her motor car and chauffeur, and her country home in Surrey, coincides closely with the real Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence (although West endows her fictional version with children and a passion for motherhood). The details are quite specific, especially the descriptions inspired by Pethick-Lawrence's country house, Holmwood, in Surrey. Some of these details emerged from articles in *Votes for Women* written by suffragettes who had stayed there to recuperate from prison experiences. It is not clear whether the young Rebecca actually met Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, but the descriptions match much later ones given by Mary Gawthorpe in her autobiography *Uphill to Holloway*.⁴³ Once again Mary Gawthorpe's experiences seem to have provided much of the source material for West's narrative.

A Suffragette Novel and More

West's deployment of *roman à clef* conventions as well as autobiography and biography is typical of the many strategies used by writers of the new sub-genre of suffrage writing, but if, as seems likely, she started

writing her novel in 1909/1910, at that time there were relatively few examples of this genre to draw on. The most important novel published before this date was Elizabeth Robins's *The Convert* (1907). The young Rebecca had almost certainly read this novel and, with her avid interest in drama, had probably read the earlier dramatic version, *Votes For Women* (1907), if she had not also seen it performed. Certain events befalling Adela Furnival may well be borrowed from Robins's novel: both heroines inherit a large sum of money, for example, and both are seduced by older men.⁴⁴ The story of Adela's initiation into the militant movement, her meeting with suffragette heroines and her own experiences of by-elections, militant actions and imprisonment are characteristic of many suffrage novels. Some of the propagandist strategies are also typical, for instance where documentary evidence is blended with particular narrative techniques—the use of dialogue to inform or persuade and the blending of some of the conventions typical of the popular novel, such as the marriage plot, with journalistic realism.⁴⁵

But there is another voice that runs counter to the suffrage narrative, radicalizing it through its urgent inquiry into the nature of sexual desire. While suffrage fiction did not necessarily eschew the romance plot, 'Passion, when it occurs, is presented as a reward for the woman who has achieved fulfilment within an approved context—either found in the cause itself or through marriage'.⁴⁶ But Book I of West's novel begins with a seduction that is both an awakening and a revelation for the schoolgirl Adela,⁴⁷ and a concern with sexuality is threaded through the suffrage narrative with an extraordinary openness and intensity. This seduction, like the references to prostitution⁴⁸ and the sexual crises triggered by the declarations of her two admirers, Matthew Race and Robert Langlad, in Book II, situate the novel within the context of the 'New Woman' writing. This new kind of fiction, first published in the 1890s, was characterized by a shocking frankness about sexuality and a rejection of traditional representations of 'woman', often challenging the 'natural' inevitability of the marriage plot.⁴⁹ While some 'New Woman' writers advocated sexual purity for women, others embraced doctrines of 'free love', and motherhood was both celebrated and attacked. This new genre, so full of contradictions, also had close connections with the 'sex novel', which grew out of the growing preoccupation of early twentieth-century novelists with questions of sexual psychology.⁵⁰

The 'New Woman' novel contributed to turn-of-the-century anxieties about gender difference. Traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity came under intense scrutiny as, in the wake of Darwin and Spencer, exponents of biological determinism debated the issues alongside followers of 'the new sex science and the emergent theory and practice of psychoanalysis'.⁵¹ Traditional associations of the feminine with weakness were projected and imposed on the state of society itself, leading to theories of degeneration and emasculation.⁵² The idea of 'womanliness' and what it implied became contested ground too, not only between those who were pro- or anti-women's suffrage, but also within the different women's movements. Feminists trying to redefine the feminine were confronted with a variety of stereotypical views, such as assumptions of mental and physical fragility, the connections between femininity and piety and the duties of motherhood inherited from nineteenth-century thought, as well as contemporary scientific evaluations.

By creating a heroine with a complex sexual history, West evokes contemporary anxieties about female sexuality and femininity, reflecting a major preoccupation of so much late Victorian and early twentieth-century writing, as well as her own.⁵³ The schoolgirl Adela's rejection of a marriage proposal after her brief affair with Neville Ashcroft in the first section of the novel provokes a complex, sometimes contradictory portrayal of sexual convictions and conduct that is maintained throughout the novel: 'My sin is not that I gave myself to you without the sanction of the law. It may be an important point, but somehow I've lost sight of it myself. My sin was that I gave myself to you without the sanction of love' (*Sentinel*, 23).

In the outspoken mode of contemporary New Woman novelists, West tries to depict Adela's unease over the revelation of her sexual impulses.⁵⁴ Her sense of shame over the nature of her sexual awakening is exacerbated by her involvement with the suffragettes, and her growing sense of having been defiled (thus making her a traitor to the feminist cause and later to the man she loves) more than likely derives from the doctrine of purity and bodily control upheld by the WSPU.⁵⁵ But Adela's attraction, later in the novel, to Robert Langlad whose 'face was extraordinarily refined and was bisexual in its masculine ruggedness' (*Sentinel*, 29), suggests a rather different source of ideas, the writings of the Edwardian sexologists Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, instead of the doctrines of the Pankhursts. West would have been familiar with their respective

considerations of sexuality, homosexuality, sexual reform and more, through her Fabian connections.

Adela's initiation into both sexual and political knowledge is a key preoccupation in the novel. In addition, West creates male suitors whose sexual innocence makes their experience of desire as overwhelming as Adela's. The portrayal of Adela's developing relationship with Robert Langlad, her sense of class differences⁵⁶ clashing with an overall empathy, and her awakening desire for him, is particularly striking. This pairing is set up as a deliberate contrast with the Adela/Ashcroft relationship, made clear in the description of Adela's realization of her passion for Langlad, which is both violent and pure: 'Its violence tortured her: she wanted to cry out, to cut herself [...]. The freshness and purity of her own sensations amazed her. She felt a desire for perfect intimacy with Langlad' (*Sentinel*, 182).

Symbolically, Adela recognizes her feelings in the moment when the train in which she is travelling with Langlad emerges out of the darkness of a tunnel into the sunlight. Langlad's awakening earlier in the narrative is described in similar melodramatic and physical terms as he gazes on Adela's sleeping body: 'His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, he almost sobbed' (*Sentinel*, 104). The language of these revelations is both awkwardly adolescent and at the same time characteristic of 'New Woman' and sensation fiction, which employed conventions of melodrama and Gothic writing.⁵⁷ The novel is never finished, the relationship with Langlad never resolved, but Adela's suppressed desire for him, and, within a different framework, her desire for motherhood complicate West's narrative, anticipating her early and sustained admiration for the work of writers like D. H. Lawrence. In a review published in *The Freewoman* in 1912, she describes Lawrence's novel, *The Trespasser*, as 'magic', and praises his descriptions of the ecstasy of love, stating that he 'treats it with reality, he attains past it to the most godlike point of discontent; he perceives the failure of love'.⁵⁸

The frankness of West's attempt to write about desire within a heterosexual context is radical enough for its time, but it is her working out of the relationships between women, specifically between Adela and Psyche, that is particularly astonishing in this novel. Barbara Green's comment highlights this:

Though I know of no work that traces relations between the feminist gaze and feminine desire, between emerging discussions of homosexuality (in journals like *The Freewoman*) and suffrage activism, it is clear that the women's

movement accomplished two things: it created a space for almost entirely feminine communities where women celebrated, suffered, spoke with, and wrote for other women, and it allowed women to put themselves on display for other women.⁵⁹

The Sentinel might be seen as one of these absent texts, presenting Adela as not only the woman who is looked at and desired by men, but also the woman who looks at and celebrates the beauty of other women. A striking feature throughout the novel is a consistent concern with the visual representation of women, which becomes a theme and a potential structuring device, holding the unwieldy narrative together. From the earliest part of the novel the reader is presented with portraits of women—the actual portrait Neville Ashcroft is painting of Adela in Book I; the visual impact of the suffragette leaders on Adela, especially Psyche Charteris; recurring pre-Raphaelite paintings of women; Adela's portrayal of Rosie Essletree, charged with infanticide, as an earthly Madonna; the sorrowing portrait of the Russian heroine, Maria Spiridonova, to name only a few. This preoccupation with the visual, especially the painterly, anticipates West's lifelong interest in the visual arts⁶⁰ and also her response to suffragette uses of the theatrical and spectacular—in pageantry and street processions, the employment of feminine and fashionable dress codes, for example. Through their advertising, their demonstrations and their militant acts, the suffragettes aimed to exploit the combination of spectacle and femininity for 'revolutionary feminist ends'.⁶¹

Adela is first depicted in Book I as a woman observed and desired, and part of her delight in being a suffragette and becoming involved in politics years later is the opportunity it affords to enter a new sphere of self-definition. Her first experience of a pre-election meeting at West Saltgreave is delightful to her, because her presence is treated as political rather than sexual: 'Not often to the average woman comes the joy of being treated by a man as a human being. Sex is hidden away into its proper intimate shrine' (*Sentinel*, 98).⁶² But the woman's movement also offers the possibility of creating a space for the woman who looks, and through the motif of the portrait, West explores the idea of women as spectators of each other. Her unashamed spectatorship of feminine beauty anticipates the regenerative qualities of the female body elsewhere in West's writing—for the narrator in her 1913 essay, 'Nana', for example.⁶³ Adela's appreciation of female beauty is

obvious throughout, from her admiration of the statue of a slender nymph in her aunt's garden, in Book I, to her uninhibited attraction to the waitresses in the Cecilbourn tea room: 'They moved their exquisitely moulded bodies with such superterrestrial gravity of grace, their ears open to only the songs of the stars' (*Sentinel*, 150-1). The beauty of Maud Seppel, Adela's cousin, is also a source of inspiration and adoration for Adela, 'always a willing captive to pretty women' (*Sentinel*, 154).⁶⁴ But looking on the physical loveliness of these women is a passive, merely aesthetic experience for Adela in this context; it becomes eroticized and politicized amongst suffragettes.

The attention paid to the physical portraits of the suffragettes in *The Sentinel* is another typical feature of the suffrage novel, since the way women 'appeared' had acquired a powerful political dimension.⁶⁵ Characteristically portrayed by anti-suffragists as manly and unattractive, suffragists and particularly suffragettes went to great lengths to emphasize their femininity and 'womanliness'.⁶⁶ In the case of the suffragettes, this emphasis was represented by careful attention to attire, so that long dresses and large hats were always worn, even as women were performing 'unfeminine' acts, such as window smashing.⁶⁷ Adela's suffragette friends, Mary Gerald, Psyche Charteris and Leslie Macarthur, are all depicted as slight, fragile-looking women, like their real-life counterparts. When she first meets Psyche Charteris, Adela is struck by her child-like appearance. Sharing a room in a hotel, Adela watches the sleeping Psyche in a reversal of the earlier incident where Robert Langlad comes upon Adela asleep and her sleeping figure awakens his love and desire.⁶⁸ In a re-enactment and rewriting of this moment, Adela watches Psyche's sleeping face, realizing that 'Psyche's character had had the same tremendous effect on [her] that the sudden entry into strange scenery or hearing of a new development of music exerts on perceptive minds' (*Sentinel*, 165).

Looking at Psyche sparks off a revelation, an almost Proustian moment that goes beyond the experience of the aesthetic to a quasi-religious response. The nature of this erotic and near religious reaction is again suggested through the description of Psyche's body: 'The moonlight of the brilliant crescent soaked through the blind and lay on Psyche's body, stretched sword-straight under the white linen. Adela wondered [...] to what new ordeal this implacable young warrior would lead her' (*Sentinel*, 166). Psyche's 'sword-straight' body represents the militant nature of the movement but it is also, ironically, a phallic image

with erotic implications. The motif of the militant body is extended further into the realm of the erotic when the bruises on Psyche's body, sustained in 'battle', become the inspiration for Adela's own aggression: 'Her mind delighted in the thought of the coming attack on outrageous evil: as medieval knights thought before action on their "lady's" lips, so she thought on Psyche's purple arms' (*Sentinel*, 217). Adela's feminist gaze is only obliquely linked to feminine desire in the sense described here by Barbara Green, since Adela does not desire Psyche but desires what her body represents, 'the harsh brutality of modern warfare' (*Sentinel*, 191). The bruises, described in Psyche's case as looking 'something like an outpour of ink on blotting paper' (*Sentinel*, 168), form a specific kind of writing on the suffragette body, becoming emblematic of courage and truth, as evocative and provocative as the clothes they wore and the banners they carried.⁶⁹ These marks are also the visual evidence of male brutality, the 'writing on the body' by a hypocritical society that refused to grant women the vote on the basis of their weakness, but was prepared to inflict physical violence in public spaces and in prisons on these same 'fragile' beings. Adela's first glimpse of Psyche's bruised body comes as a revelation and an incitement to war: 'It had the tremendous effect on Adela that trifles sometimes have on sane, well-balanced minds. [...] And it added to her qualities an avid, implacable appetite for just revenge that made her henceforth a terrible foe to evil' (*Sentinel*, 168).

Adela's body is marked and eroticized too. During the attack on the car by a group of Liberal Stewards, when Psyche is nearly strangled and Maude Brooke is kicked in the shins and stomach, Adela is struck in the chest. The bruising Adela sustains, described in rather Gothic terms, takes on even greater symbolic significance than Psyche's battered body. Not only is the bruising a consequence of physical, even sexual assault, it is also an assault on the child-bearing capacity of the suffragettes, unsexing and oversexing them simultaneously. The vulnerability of suffragettes to sexual attack was one of the dangers of their campaign that 'breached the social distance between men and women'.⁷⁰ The bruised breast acquires a personal significance for Adela, who comes to associate it with her passion for Langlad and her refusal to act on that passion: 'With the curious diffused imagination of a sick person she grew to associate this grief with the bruise on her breasts' (*Sentinel*, 216). The bruise is a mark of sexual insult and a mark of sexual denial.⁷¹

The eroticism implicit in Adela's contemplation of Psyche's bruised body and the bruises on her own body, surfaces briefly in a highly charged scene. Describing the three-day vigil of Psyche, Adela and Maude Brooke in the attic, West treats the relations between Adela and Psyche more daringly and explicitly. Here underlying homoerotic tensions are juxtaposed to heterosexual yearnings:

She [Adela] often woke during these two long nights, moaning for Langlad, and found Psyche crying through the sound sleep of one habitually starved of rest; not from cowardice but from sheer physical pain. So they would snuggle in each other's arms and lie cuddling innocently till some concussion of their tender bodies sent them shuddering apart. In the light of day their relations were less openly intimate. (*Sentinel*, 216)

'Innocently' replaces 'together' in the manuscript (see the textual notes on p. 216), revealing West's self-conscious tentativeness about the nature of her subject and the openness with which she could address it. This becomes more evident in Adela's response to Psyche's revelation of her 'pure passions', her love of women: 'For a second Adela experienced the shame that the beloved suffer at the white fingers [if virgin]' (*Sentinel*, 217). Venturing briefly where few suffrage writers had dared to go, before retreating through Adela's obscure response, West attempts to offer her own insights into the erotic intensity of certain suffragette friendships. Adela is inspired by the bruised and sleeping body of Psyche to steel herself for battle in the name of women's suffrage; Psyche is inspired by Adela's wish to leave her money to the movement in the event of her death, to declare unambiguously her own desires. The openness of this account is never repeated in West's fiction, but it does anticipate the more submerged eroticism of the revitalizing and regenerative woman, present in much of her early writing.⁷²

The Sentinel as Social Critique

West's vivid suffragette portraits, her narrative boldly juxtaposing heterosexual and homosexual desire and her blunt depictions of violence, are some of the most striking features of this early novel. These portraits also provide a platform for social commentary, a critique of sexual double standards and the inadequacy of government policies on women, education and work through the presentation of a young woman who has killed her child; motherhood through a comparison of the complacent Marie Hereford with the suffragettes.

Adela wakes from her delirium, the consequence of her first experience of imprisonment, to find herself in the presence of a young prisoner whose 'foolishly curling and very light chestnut hair, and the direct glance of the eyes that were blue as glory-of-the-snow' give her the appearance of 'an earthly Madonna' (*Sentinel*, 58).⁷³ She is visualized for the reader in a pre-Raphaelite pose: 'Rosie Essletree was standing with her hands clasped behind her, looking up [at] a stream of dancing motes at the window' (*Sentinel*, 60), beauty and innocence incarnate. And yet she is waiting to be sentenced for the murder of her baby. West's insistence on presenting Rosie Essletree as a Madonna figure recalls Hardy's description of Tess of the D'Urbervilles as a 'pure woman'.⁷⁴ Basing her story on the contemporary and much publicized case of Daisy Lord, who at 19 had murdered her baby (see Explanatory Notes 90 and 91, pp. 260-1), West uses the disjunction between the visual impact of her fictionalized character and the apparent brutality of her crime, to highlight the absurd gap between society's treatment of women and its expectations of 'womanly behaviour'. 'The State had conferred on Rosie the benefits of a free education so practical that at fourteen the well-behaved, quick-witted girl was flung into the comparatively unskilled and non-productive labour of the laundry' (*Sentinel*, 63). The conditions there virtually force the impoverished women into 'self-corruption' (*Sentinel*, 63). Adela's brief reference to Belfort Bax (see Explanatory Note 94, p. 261), whose pseudo-scientific theories about femininity at the time propped up traditional views about the nature of women and provoked controversy in feminist circles, provides a further context for Rosie's plight and West's critique.

The Rosie Essletree cameo is important for another reason, for it contains the seeds of West's earliest journalism. In the novel the provocative nature of her attack is undermined by an awkwardness of style, and the uncertainty of the narrative voice. But this is the forerunner to the public, authoritative and irreverent voice that characterizes her writing for *The Freewoman*. West reconfigures her fictional portrait in an article published in 1912, where she launches a scathing attack on Belfort Bax and the treatment of Daisy Lord by the State:

The State tacitly consented to Daisy being brought to such a state of physical and mental starvation that any kind of emotion—even illicit and imprudent love—was a thing not to be resisted. Then, when she was going to have a child, the State created such a strong feeling against her that the last drop of courage was squeezed out of a weakened body, and she dared not risk

exposure by calling assistance during childbirth. So that, in a fit of delirium, she killed her baby [...]. Then Mr Bax wants the State to finish its beneficent ministrations to Daisy by hanging her. This is the limit.⁷⁵

In this version, West has found her platform and her audience.

Rosie Essletree also provides the first opportunity in the novel, in a series of scenes that could be described as set pieces, for the discussion of motherhood, an abiding concern throughout though not treated in any detail in other contemporary suffrage narratives.⁷⁶ Motherhood was of course central to the debate about redefining the nature of 'woman', it was 'a site of contradiction for women. It was the principal element in the definition and regulation of female sexuality and at the same time a source of feminine power'.⁷⁷ Such a preoccupation might have been surprising in such a young writer, had it not been at the heart not only of feminist debate at the time, but of a broader political debate too.⁷⁸ The ideology of motherhood was taken up by various sectors of society, including feminists, eugenicists and pressure groups such as the Fabians. The Fabians proposed an 'Endowment of Motherhood' policy, that is 'financial recognition by the state that mother's work rearing children contributed to the good of society'. This proposal, 'effectively an economic version of the eugenicists' elevation of motherhood', provides an important context for this novel.⁷⁹ As a new member of the Fabian Society, West was no doubt eager to explore some of its latest theories.

So Rosie Essletree's plight highlights the hypocrisy of a system that elevates the status of motherhood on the one hand, but punishes those who do not conform to its definitions. Adela sees herself as a surrogate mother for Rosie and women like her, expanding the definition of motherhood, while accepting its traditional idealization: 'When Rosie's tear-drenched face nuzzled into her bosom she had made Adela her mother' (*Sentinel*, 141). In contrast to this 'earthly madonna' who has murdered her baby, West presents two different versions of mothering by comparing Adela's cousin Marie with the suffragette Leslie Macarthur. Leslie, a vibrant and brave woman who is willing to go to prison for the cause, is also passionate about her children and their upbringing. In conversation with an aristocratic neighbour, Leslie declares: "Oh, I've peculiar ideas about motherhood [...]. I have wild notions that nobility of action may be inherited. So I do my best!" (*Sentinel*, 80). The attention paid to the vibrancy and energy of her children makes a clear contrast with Marie Hereford's larger but more sickly brood, also depicted in some detail. Compared with Leslie, Marie

is an unthinking producer of progeny whose health becomes more delicate the more children she has: 'Indeed, Marie was the Ideal Woman of the Anti-Suffragist for she had always on her lap new babies and old stockings' (*Sentinel*, 124). Indebted to contemporary eugenicist discourses, West depicts Marie's benign but mindless childbearing as a threat to the state: 'The parenthood of these two people was merely the chance result of an animal function'. Instead, 'Motherhood meant patience, courage, self-discipline, nobility [...] Certainly much evil is wrought today by the idiotic expectation of fine sons from weak, luxurious women. Motherhood as a skilled industry has not yet been discovered' (*Sentinel*, 131-2).⁸⁰

As well as using the device of set pieces comparing 'good' and 'inadequate' methods of mothering, West extends the definition of motherhood to the celibate and childless leaders of the suffragette movement, whose nurturing of the movement for the liberation of women is seen to be as creative and productive as child-rearing itself. 'In spite of this deprivation of motherhood Mary Gerald and Psyche Charteris were not sterile. By their labours the superb essence of their souls was reproduced infinitely on the earth' (*Sentinel*, 234-5).⁸¹ For Adela, Mary Gerald and Psyche Charteris become universal mothers of an ennobled people, an image that is consistent with much feminist doctrine of the time. Paradoxically, Adela's contemplation of the nurturing qualities of these women takes place while she is in the process of starving herself on the hunger strike, and thus potentially denying herself the possibility of real or spiritual motherhood.⁸² But later in the narrative when the pregnant Leslie Macarthur visits Adela, convalescing after her hunger strike ordeal, West endorses her earlier point about suffragettes and mothering. In Leslie's contemplation of Adela's ordeal, a direct comparison is made between suffragette sacrifice and childbirth, but while Leslie sees the former as a kind of stillbirth, 'not a crumb of motherhood to hope for at the end', Adela instead feels that she is 'foster-mother of every man and woman of the future' (*Sentinel*, 242). The traditional nurturing qualities of women are politicized and spiritualized here. West's fictionalized debates about maternity show a theoretical acceptance of some of the salient ideologies of motherhood.⁸³ But these issues remained at the forefront of much of West's writing, particularly after the birth of her own illegitimate son in 1914.

Reading Suffrage Writing

The connections West makes in this novel between different kinds of violence—childbirth, desire, and suffragette self-sacrifice, that is, between private experiences and the highly publicized imprisonment and torture of women—are part of what makes *The Sentinel* so startling an experiment. And its representation of scenes of violence against women, prison conditions and forcible feeding are among the most gruesome and gruelling in suffrage literature. The incidents described are not autobiographical, however; although West witnessed several clashes and skirmishes, '[s]he never came into conflict with the law herself, though once, outside the House of Commons in London, she had to wriggle out of her coat, leaving it in the hands of two policemen, and escaped by crawling away through the crowd'.⁸⁴ The descriptions of Adela's imprisonments, the attacks that she and the other suffragettes endure during a campaign (*Sentinel*, 203) and the experience of forcible feeding probably derive from personal testaments of suffragettes she knew and accounts she had read. Testimonies about a variety of experiences of violence, especially that of forcible feeding, were published in newspapers, suffrage journals, pamphlets and novels.⁸⁵ West uses the journalistic, documentary material in two ways in the novel: either as a base on which to construct a scene imaginatively, or as a factual overlay on her fiction, creating a textual collage documenting the period.

West's blending of journalistic fact and fiction is evident in the descriptions of the attack mounted against Adela, Psyche and Maude in a car by Liberal stewards. Contrary to the practices of much suffragette writing which 'missed opportunities in not writing about violence',⁸⁶ West describes violent clashes between the suffragettes and their enemies with great vividness, even relish, and she does not neglect to point out that the women fought back. Adela attacks Psyche's assailant who is in the process of strangling her: 'In a second he was on her again, biting her in the soft part of the arm, below the elbow. Sick with loathing and mad with pain, she had to tear his teeth apart till her fingers were dripping with his slaver. As soon as she was free she snatched off her scarf and flung it round his throat, twisting it tighter and tighter till he reeled backwards' (*Sentinel*, 203).

This violent attack, in which Psyche is almost strangled and Maude and Adela suffer severe injuries, appears to be based very closely on an event reported in *Votes For Women*, in which Adela Pankhurst and

several other suffragettes were attacked by a crowd of Liberal stewards: 'Miss Adela Pankhurst was nearly pulled out of the car, and the clothes of other women were torn [...]. The women were struck and had sods thrown at them, and they had literally to fight for their lives'.⁸⁷ West's reconstruction of the report in *Votes for Women* details the violence inflicted on the women, and also the aggressive passion of Adela in defending herself and the others.⁸⁸ Her 'unladylike' behaviour in punching and trying to strangle one of the men, and the grotesque images of the wounded body (the 'white rose' of saliva gathering at the half-strangled Psyche's lips, for example) are convincing touches that rarely surface in other pro-suffrage novels.⁸⁹ Such a portrayal was in danger of undermining the carefully cultivated image of 'womanliness', which the WSPU tried to project alongside its militancy, as well as discouraging potential recruits. West's imaginative description of actual events disintegrates the representation of the suffragette with all its Victorian delicacy about 'femininity', and gestures towards a naturalistic depiction of the body made grotesque with suffering.

A similar naturalism is evident in the depictions of Adela's hunger strike and forcible feeding, but this time it is a realism extracted directly from documentary evidence. The large india rubber tube is forced down: 'She could not breathe. It irritated her throat and lacerated the mucous membrane [...]. With her set and glassy eyes she saw her body begin to writhe and resist: of itself it began to twist from side to side about the transfixing tube and try to expel it. Almost immediately she became violently sick' (*Sentinel*, 236).

For the details of the ordeal, West borrows from reports by those who had been through the experience, such as the one written by Mary Leigh to her solicitor, published in *Votes for Women* in 1909⁹⁰ and, even more closely, a speech given by Lady Constance Lytton in 1910:

The doctor put the steel gag in somewhere on my gums and forced open my mouth until it was yawning wide. As he proceeded to force into my mouth and down the throat a large rubber tube, I felt as if I were being killed—absolute suffocation is the feeling. You feel as though it would never stop. You cannot breathe, and yet you choke. It irritates the throat, it irritates the mucous membrane as it goes down, every second seems an hour, and you think they will never finish pushing it down. After a while the sensation is relieved, then food is poured down, and then again you choke, and your whole body resists and writhes under the treatment.⁹¹

West's near direct transcription of a documentary report differs from the practices of other suffrage writers who also included these experiences in their narrative. For example, Gertrude Colemore's description of the ordeal in *Suffragette Sally* avoids the horrible detail and drama that West includes, through a detached, impersonal narrative voice: 'The prisoner had to be placed in a chair [...] while the doctor and his assistant forced down the stomach-tube into the prisoner's stomach, and then poured in the food'.⁹² While she does not explore the analogy many suffragettes (although few novelists) made between forcible feeding and rape,⁹³ the emphasis on the physical horror of the ordeal heightens the brutality of the men and women inflicting this on the persecuted suffragette. Her appropriation of reportage and her insistence on portraying the suffragettes as sometimes grotesquely physical, serve both to enrich her narrative and to shock her potential readers.

A Literary and Political Apprenticeship

The sources for West's depiction of the most violent aspects of Adela's experiences as a feminist militant are mainly textual, drawn from the proliferation of suffrage writing in the form of newspapers (*Votes for Women* for the WSPU, *The Vote* for the Women's Freedom League, *The Common Cause* for the NUWSS), or else as pamphlets, short stories and novels. On one level, then, the novel is a suffragette collage, a textual composition over and through which West created her own story and revealed her already irresistible desire to comment, even to pass judgement. But it is more than this too, for Adela's education through school and within the militant movement is partially through books and newspapers, reflecting, even showing off West's own voracious reading habits, giving an encyclopaedic survey of the period through texts as well as through current events. And the construction of the suffragette through reading is intimately connected with the shaping of the writer. Adela's initiations, whether textual, sexual or political, are all part of West's literary apprenticeship.

The various accounts of reading offered by writers of turn-of-the-century fiction and autobiography tended to 'indicate how the activity of reading was often the vehicle through which an individual's sense of identity was achieved or confirmed. This frequently involved the assertion of practices or preferences which opposed that which was conventionally expected of the young woman within the family

circle'.⁹⁴ *The Sentinel* clearly illustrates this point, as during the course of the novel West produces a comprehensive reading list that traces the learning process of her heroine at the same time as revealing the patterns of her own education through reading. Living with her aunt and uncle in Book I, Adela despairs over the 'half a dozen volumes of *The Quiver* and a pile of Mrs L. T. Meade's works' (*Sentinel*, 5).⁹⁵ The works of L. T. Meade, a popular writer of girls' fiction, are quite clearly an influence on the first part of the novel and West simultaneously acknowledges this explicitly and criticizes them in the first of the novel's many allusions to reading material.⁹⁶ Early on in *The Sentinel*, West asserts her political and literary allegiances by citing anti-feminist and anti-new women novels, thus defining Adela Furnival against the literature that surrounds her. So Neville Ashcroft reveals his 'true' character by proposing Mrs Humphry Ward's heroines—'anything nice and pure and sensible' (*Sentinel*, 11)—as his feminine ideal. Quotations from two of George Meredith's novels, *The Egoist* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, as well as references to works by Ibsen and Chekhov, suggest that these are the young Rebecca's preferred literary mentors.

While West supplies a list of writers through which or against which Adela defines herself, she also suggests reading matter suitable for a would-be socialist and feminist. Adela's intellectual shortcomings and strengths emerge through her programme of reading. Despite her scientific ambitions and achievements as a schoolgirl, she is portrayed as lacking in knowledge in other areas, just as her character apparently lacks passion and vitality in this first section. As a frustrated 16-year-old, she declares: 'No, there's no Art here [...]. It's like Love and Sin. I don't understand' (*Sentinel*, 6). Adela's inadequate response to art is not her only limitation. Her friendships with Mary Gerald and Robert Langlad initiate a more political and philosophical education too, introducing her to the writings of Nietzsche (*Sentinel*, 31). Whilst waiting to join a deputation, Adela reads Shelley and Leslie Macarthur reads Herbert Spencer.⁹⁷ During her convalescence after her first imprisonment and subsequent illness, Robert Langlad brings Adela a selection of books to read: "*Man and Superman, News from Nowhere, The Man of Property, Three Plays* by Granville Barker" she murmured. "How lovely! I should have read them long ago, I know. How did you know I hadn't?" (*Sentinel*, 76). Here the young writer prescribes her own recent list of reading, material for the making of a Fabian and a political thinker.

The women's movement itself placed a great deal of emphasis on reading, and creative writing was 'highly valued as an expression and extension of political identity and commitment'.⁹⁸ West as a young reader no doubt responded to the encouragement of a pastime already nurtured by her family and school. In memoirs and interviews she acknowledges their combined impact on her reading practices, recalling the influence at school of American novelist 'Gertrude Atherton, now forgotten' rather than the more famous South African novelist Olive Schreiner, and also that of Max Stirner's work on individualistic anarchism, *The Ego and His Own*.⁹⁹ Many of the writers of this period chose 'to locate crucial moments in their own development as occurring when they came into contact with a specific text'.¹⁰⁰ In the same way, Adela develops from a frustrated and bored reader of L. T. Meade's school stories and Marie Corelli's popular romances to a student of G. B. Shaw and William Morris. She becomes a reader and distributor of the WSPU publication *Votes for Women*, a publication that specifically encouraged the act of reading.¹⁰¹

West's attentive reading of *Votes for Women* is reflected in the novel's close parallels with incidents reported in this paper, but it is not the only publication that provides an education for Adela. She is astonished to find daily newspapers and their political biases the heated topic of conversation amongst her new political friends: 'For Adela's circles at Cecilbourne no one ever did anything to the *Daily Mail* except read it. She did not know that two or more disheartened reformers, meeting on a grey day, invariably crucify that journal to a disharmonious choral orgy' (*Sentinel*, 84). This comic moment precedes a brief and furious survey of a variety of newspapers, criticizing them for their attitudes to the suffragettes and feminism. Glancing through three papers on a train journey, Adela finds in *The Times* 'a long article on her own Cause' full of 'polysyllabic hysteria' and a 'turgidly vehement denunciation of any attempt to improve the moral landmarks of this excellent State of Britain' (*Sentinel*, 120). The Liberal weekly she picks up is not much better: 'she found an entertaining leader in which the editor raised a peppery invocation to the Deity to flay and bottle in boiling oil these viragoes which were at once defiling the Home and impeding Free Trade' (*Sentinel*, 120). She is most disgusted, however, by a literary weekly which in fairly plain language incites 'the stewards at Cabinet Ministers' meetings to commit indecent assault on women interrupters' (*Sentinel*, 120). Reading here functions on several levels. It summarizes and docu-

ments certain contemporary attitudes towards feminism, offering West the opportunity to deliver a scathing critique of anti-feminist discourse by making explicit the sexual and demeaning ways in which women were defined. Reading quite clearly demonstrates its own important educational function here as well as acting as a revelation and an incitement to militant action. Adela's indignant interpretation of the papers she reads leads her to see suffragism as 'a Holy War' (*Sentinel*, 121).

The many references, allusions and commentaries on texts ranging from the popular to the literary and the political to the scientific, provide the reader with a textual map onto which Adela's 'progress' and West's apprenticeship can be plotted. Her ambitious undertaking in *The Sentinel* to be all-embracing, to offer commentary on a multiplicity of topics, perhaps owes something more to her reading of the great Victorians. T. H. Huxley, Walter Bagehot and Herbert Spencer appear alongside the many modern texts West names or cites.

One of the most important of these modern texts that West refers to in the novel is *The New Age*, a magazine that engaged with politics, literature and the arts, and thus an ideal source for the thoroughly modern reader to keep abreast of current events and the latest publications. The artist Adela commissions to decorate her new house in London subscribes to this magazine and in naming it, West offers another clue to the textual underpinnings and overlays of her novel. West was herself an avid reader of the magazine, and in a review of 1912 she described her education in modern literature during religious classes at school: 'Brute force was what we loved. Kipling was our favourite author, the *New Age* our only paper, and Stephen Phillips our favourite poet'.¹⁰² Some years later she acknowledged a further important debt to *The New Age*. Arnold Bennett wrote a literary column for the paper using the pen-name Jacob Tonson, and in 1917 West wrote him a letter, declaring: 'I was for two years forced by a benevolent government to attend a cookery class every Friday afternoon, and it was my habit to make these hours that would otherwise have been unprofitable more valuable than the rest of my education put together by reading Jacob Tonson'.¹⁰³ Ibsen and Chekhov, socialism and Fabianism, Russian exiles and suffragism—all these were topics covered by the *New Age*, and Isabel Lancashire, would-be writer, literary critic and political commentator, borrowed directly from them.

Mary Gawthorpe had links with *The New Age*¹⁰⁴ and she introduced West to Dora Marsden and *The Freewoman* in 1911.¹⁰⁵ The brief history of *The Freewoman* is fascinating in itself, not least because under the editorship of Ezra Pound it became *The Egoist*, and published works by T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and other subsequently 'canonized' modernists. Dora Marsden, disenchanted with the WSPU and her role within that organization, launched and edited *The Freewoman* in 1911. For Marsden, it 'mark[ed] the point at which feminism in England ceases to be impulsive and unaware of its own features, and becomes definitely self-conscious and introspective. For the first time Feminists themselves make the attempt to reflect the Feminist movement in the mirror of thought'.¹⁰⁶ Here, certain aspects of the feminist movement came under attack, with numerous articles criticizing the excessive emphasis on the vote and the lack of other directions in feminist policies. The journal offered an initial forum for some of the debates that still preoccupy contemporary feminists. Marsden's desire to include all manner of subjects in her paper and to provoke controversy and discussion whenever possible resulted in a publication that was radical in every sense of the word, publishing articles, for example, that endorsed free love, defended homosexuality or criticized marriage.

Through this paper, which gave her the opportunity to air the views on feminism and aesthetics already voiced in *The Sentinel*, Cicely Isabel Fairfield, alias Isabel Lancashire, reinvented herself again. In her first article for the *Freewoman*, she declared that 'There are two kinds of imperialists—imperialists and bloody imperialists'.¹⁰⁷ Her verbal shock tactics, the literary equivalent of violent acts, were perfectly suited to this new feminist journal that prided itself on its anarchist streak. The incentive to air unconventional views and to foster public debate 'by publishing articles and correspondence from all sides'¹⁰⁸ suited and moulded West's early cut-and-thrust journalistic style.

Beyond *The Sentinel*

One can only speculate on the many reasons why 'Isabel Lancashire' abandoned her novel, literally in mid-sentence, leaving Adela trying to escape from an angry crowd, while the return of Robert Langlad is hinted at in marginal notes. One possible reason is shared with other suffrage novels written around this time: the problems of writing about very contemporary events. With history still in the process of

unravelling, endings were 'a particular problem for fiction written before the vote was gained; no clear political resolution could be offered and the degree of commitment to the cause as a subject was often revealed by the kind of ending adopted'.¹⁰⁹ There are other possible reasons too—lack of time, loss of interest or the rapid appearance of other suffrage novels dealing with the same issues. But the most important reason may have been dissatisfaction with the narrative itself. While the evolution of Adela Furnival from naïve schoolgirl into militant suffragette clearly follows the lines of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, at times she becomes a two-dimensional figure, a mere vehicle for the apprentice novelist's newest ideas and theories. By the end of the novel, her militancy has lost its *raison d'être*, or rather, it has become reminiscent of the fanaticism characteristic of the WSPU as whole: 'To perpetual endurance of this cruel life, unstimulated, undeterred by any ties of human affection, Adela looked forward' (*Sentinel*, 250). Adela's self-sacrificing devotion is motivated by sexual denial, her resistance to Robert Langlad. By the time she was writing this part of the novel, it is likely that West's own personal circumstances were in the process of changing too. Her allegiances to the WSPU, so strong in the Edinburgh teenager, were shifting. The doctrines of sexual purity and denial embraced by the militant feminists, which contribute to Adela's inner conflicts and even her own growing militancy, came under intense scrutiny as West began to align herself with the radical modern and modernist formulations of *The Freewoman*.

By the end of the narrative this emerging ideological conflict perhaps only enhanced West's sense of the irreparable fissures in the novel as a whole. The abandonment of the novel at the moment when the heroine's political commitment is endangering her life and her would-be lover is literally marginalized, aptly illustrates a narrative *impasse*. What were the possible outcomes for such a story? Earlier novels with suffrage as a theme offered stark alternatives: either a submission to the romance plot, such as is indicated in H. G. Wells's *Anne Veronica*, where the heroine abandons politics for domestic bliss, or the self-sacrifice of the eponymous heroine in Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally*, who dies as result of her hunger strike. A new kind of narrative was necessary for this essentially new kind of woman. Virginia Woolf failed to solve this conundrum in her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, allowing Rachel Vinrace to die rather than succumb to the traditional outcome of the marriage plot. Perhaps

West abandoned Adela because she could not envisage a future for her, and because she could not resolve the tensions that resulted from her multiple subjects and the way they were voiced. For the novel is composed of a series of discourses, jostling for supremacy. The unmistakable discourse of militant feminist propaganda clashes with her attempt to express a subtle psychological realism; the melodramatic voice of the suffrage and New Woman novel is also a self-conscious one, aware of the need to 'make it new' again: the passionate and urgent voice of the daring young writer is inevitably constrained by taboo subjects and self-censorship.

For West journalism became one way of avoiding such narrative problems, by channelling and re-expressing many of the preoccupations already evident in *The Sentinel*. A distinctive voice began to emerge in her articles for feminist and left-wing papers, retaining traces of the narrative voice of the novel, but with a new irony, satire and humour. Even feminists, especially the WSPU, were not exempt from her wit and venom: 'Life ought not to be divided into watertight compartments. Apparently feminism seems a simple matter to many suffragettes, like floating a patent medicine'.¹¹⁰ Ellen Key, feminist and pacifist, is accused of changing 'the continental woman's movement from a march towards freedom to a romp towards voluptuous servitude'.¹¹¹ West became especially critical of the growing puritanism of the WSPU leadership, seeing within it the signs of intolerance and hatred that feminism had set out to counter: 'The strange uses to which we put our new-found liberty! There was a long and desperate struggle before it became possible for women to write candidly on subjects such as these. That this power should be used to express views that would be old-fashioned and uncharitable in the pastor of a Little Bethel is a matter for scalding tears'.¹¹² The hero-worship of the suffragettes and admiration of militant action, as depicted in *The Sentinel*, are transformed in the early journalism into sympathetic portrayals of suffragette courage and endeavour as well as acute criticism of the underlying flaws in their doctrine and practices. Through her journalism, then, writing became for West a public form of politics and politics became one way in which she deliberately 'constructed herself as a modern woman of letters'.¹¹³

The success of her political, journalistic voice did not erase West's interest in aesthetics, and *The Freewoman* offered her a space to explore this too. 'Demanding truth in art, as in journalism, the *Freewoman* claimed that a radical restructuring of literature—as well as the role

literature plays in society—was key to creating a new feminist culture. The *Freewoman* favoured experimental forms of writing, anything that broke through the confining Victorian conceptions of the sexes as tragically and sexually at odds'.¹¹⁴ In a letter to Dora Marsden of early 1913, West expressed her views explicitly. Engaged in helping to relaunch *The Freewoman* as *The New Freewoman* in 1913 after the paper's financial collapse (West's contribution was energetic and essential), she complained to Marsden that in the back issues of *The Freewoman* she had noticed that 'there was no literary side to it at all. Visiak and my still small voice were the only notes of dissent in a storm of purely moral and intellectual enthusiasm'.¹¹⁵ In the light of this, she suggests to Marsden that: 'A literary side would be a bribe to the more frivolous minded in London, and I don't see why a movement towards freedom of expression in literature should not be associated with and inspired by your gospel'.¹¹⁶

West pursued these ideas in her creative life too, beginning with rewriting *The Sentinel* as *Adela* during the early part of her journalistic career (late 1911/12). For *Adela* she reworked Book I of the earlier novel, expanding and politicizing the story of schoolgirl Adela Furnival. She retained the Midland setting, making it more industrial and more evocative of the somewhat impoverished living conditions of the Fairfield family when they moved to Edinburgh. Stylistically, the *Adela* fragment is more accomplished than the first part of *The Sentinel*, through the way in which West directs irony both at her heroine and at the suffragette movement, as well as through a more controlled and assured use of language. It also expands on certain issues touched on but not explored in the earlier novel. In the *Adela* fragment, West examines the economic restrictions on her heroine's progress, replacing the fantasy of the wealthy orphan in *The Sentinel* with a heroine whose familial circumstances deprive her of further education and a future. In *Adela* West retains the visit to wealthy relatives in the country where Adela meets a handsome and seductive older man, although the narrative ends soon after their meeting. She uses the country house setting more than she had done in *The Sentinel* to investigate Adela's socialist leanings, through the discussion of a recent strike with her relatives and their friends. The genteel set of wealthy relatives are contrasted with Adela's home environment:

In Saltgrave no three people of Adela's set ever met together without delightedly hurling themselves into debate. On an afternoon like this Mr

Purkiss and Miss Ralton and she would have finished off the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, the Minimum Wage, and the Disestablishment of the Welsh Church, and then parted reluctantly.¹¹⁷

West addresses all these contemporary issues in *The Sentinel* and in her journalism. The humour of this passage is created by an ironic formulation West also employs in her non-fiction: for example, discussing the enforced asceticism of women in 'A New Woman's Movement', West noted: 'But then, of course, wherever women are gathered together for the purpose of work their spirits are tamed by partial starvation'.¹¹⁸ The humour is sharper and more focused in 'A New Woman's Movement', but the similarities in style and formulation again reveal the affinities between her fiction and journalism at this stage.

As with *The Sentinel*, we can only speculate as to why *Adela* was also abandoned. Perhaps West sensed that here too the narrative remained aesthetically inadequate, perhaps personal circumstances were already becoming complicated. Whatever the reasons, the *Sentinel/Adela* narratives remained unfinished. Her first fiction to be published was the short story 'Indissoluble Matrimony', which appeared in the Vorticist magazine *Blast* in 1914. Her critical study of Henry James appeared in 1916, and in 1918 she published her first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*. *Henry James* and *The Return of the Soldier* are companion texts, marking a shift in West's aesthetic. They reveal the influence of new mentors, encountered through the literary circle of Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt: 'Under their guidance I contemplated a changing fiction which had already in the hands of Henry James and Joseph Conrad, claimed new rights'.¹¹⁹ Traces of West's exploration of the narrative dimensions of desire, the ecstasy of love and also the consequences of its repression in *The Sentinel*, can be found in *The Return of the Soldier*, written with the knowledge of Freud's work,¹²⁰ and these preoccupations recur even more powerfully in *The Judge* (1922). This novel marked a significant departure from the earlier one, bemusing contemporary and much later critics alike. For *The Judge* begins with a tale of suffragettes, a young idealistic 'New Woman', Ellen Melville, and an older man, Richard Yaverland. It shifts into the realm of melodrama and the Gothic as a study of single motherhood in relation to desire and the monstrous consequences of its repression. Parallels with *The Sentinel* are obvious and it is clear that West's first experiment provides a vital key to understanding her second novel, its choice of subject and preoccupations, and what she was trying to achieve.

Part One of *The Judge* consciously or unconsciously reworks the *Sentinel/Adela* duo. Certain striking images and descriptions run through all three narratives, for example the description of the railway 'unning through West Saltgreave in *The Sentinel*, 'that from north to south stretched a dark gleaming ribbon, jewelled with rich red and green lights' (*Sentinel*, 107) is barely altered in *Adela*, which opens with a vivid portrayal of Saltgreave: 'She pretended to luxury, for the red and green signals on the railway-line that sundered her straightly from North to South gleamed richly like jewels on the ribbon of darkness'.¹²¹ Ten years later in *The Judge*, the same image is used in Part Two as Ellen arrives in London by train: 'but a train far down the line pulled out of the station and disclosed a knot of red and green signal lights that warmed the eye and thence the heart as jewels do'.¹²² West's return to her earlier narratives for images, characters and narrative plot can be compared to the series of revisions Virginia Woolf made to her first novel, *The Voyage Out*:

Clearly, there was something in the material with which Woolf was working that did not allow her to let go of this first novel, that would not permit her to release it to the world, that dictated that she rewrite it again and again, changing it and modifying it to satisfy some deeply-felt and perhaps only dimly-perceived artistic and emotional needs.¹²³

A comparable obsessiveness is evident in the sequence of West's texts in which there are several characters or even types and events to which West returns. The figure of the rebellious young woman as schoolgirl and suffragette is reworked in each narrative: Adela Furnival's militant activism in Manchester and London in *The Sentinel*, Adela's amazonian attack on the men who threaten her in *Adela* and Ellen Melville's suffragette activities, selling *Votes for Women* on the streets of Edinburgh and attending suffrage meetings. The ordeals suffered as a result of her feminist activism in *The Sentinel*, and derived mainly from the narratives of others, are excluded from *The Judge*, or at least, Ellen's love affair with Richard and the death of her mother interrupt a feminist activism that might otherwise have led to prison and the hunger strike. A preoccupation with fragile, even weak mothers and degenerate fathers is also evident in *Adela* and *The Judge*. Adela's seduction in *The Sentinel* by the decadent architect figure is anticipated in *Adela* and reworked as the more threatening scene in which Mr Philip James contemplates seducing if not raping Ellen, in Part One of *The Judge*. What is begun in *The Sentinel* is not so much ended in

The Judge, but obsessively rewritten. West's earliest suffragette fictions are later embedded in a text about feminist ideals that are swept away, reflecting aspects of the upheavals of her own life and also, allegorically, of the history of feminism in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.¹²⁴ While West as 'Isabel Lancashire' could not imagine or envisage an ending for her first suffragette stories as she wrote them, their inconclusiveness can be seen as creating psychic gaps to which she returned as the story of her own life and history unravelled itself.

Epilogue

The Sentinel, then, is a source, an originating text out of which, at the least, *Adela*, West's early journalism and *The Judge* emerged. Its incompleteness and openness are part of its richness, generating more ideas than it could contain, testing the limits of its multiple genres and subjects. A palimpsest, even a modernist collage, this earliest novel is itself composed of a tissue of texts, oral and written, fictional and journalistic, personal as well as public. It offers the reader essential insights into who Rebecca West was prior to the creation of her public persona in *The Freewoman* and what she was seeking as a young writer. It provides encyclopaedic reference to a troubled period in British history and West's sense of her position during that time. What is most striking about the novel is its ambition and boldness, as a political document, as a work of fiction that is also about fiction and about finding an appropriate mode of discourse. Written with passion and depicting political and sexual passions, it is a seminal work whose resonances can be traced throughout West's later writing.

In this edition of *The Sentinel* I hope to offer not the final word on the new and original text, but instead a series of possible entry points into and beyond it. And there is still detective work to be done, both on the manuscript and on the text. There are missing pages to be tracked down, perhaps in another archive, questions to be answered about obscure references in the novel and more connections with contemporary works to be made. This edition marks an important advance in the ongoing reassessment of the early writing of Rebecca West. Her flawed but compelling novel marks the beginning of an extraordinary career.

Notes

1. McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Rebecca West Collection AMs. II.60a:1-4.
2. Antonia Till (ed.), *Rebecca West: The Only Poet and Other Stories* (London: Virago, 1992), 17-59.
3. My thanks to Professor Jon Stallworthy for discussions of the manuscript handwriting.
4. See the fuller discussion of this in the Note on the Manuscript, p. liv.
5. For the sake of clarity she will be referred to throughout as Rebecca West, the name she wrote under from 1911.
6. Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West* (London: Papermac, 1987), 30.
7. Herbert Asquith, notoriously anti women's suffrage, became Prime Minister of the Liberal government in 1908. Suffragette militancy was the WSPU's response to the government's refusal to address their demands for equal rights.
8. See Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage 1905-1938* (London: Macmillan, 1997).
9. See Green on how 'modernist thinkers found the signs of modernity in the suffrage movement—its connections with mobility and mass movements, its reorganization of dominant notions of feminine sexuality, and its existence as modern profession for the new woman—and reveal the deep connections between feminist strategies and problems of modernity' (*Spectacular Confessions*, 169).
10. Interestingly too, the voice reveals traces of a Scottish dialect in the novel, barely noticeable but evident in some of the vocabulary chosen ('anent' and 'amn't I', for example; see pp. 196, 145, 168). This is the voice of an Edinburgh suffragette, Cicely Fairfield, before she became the London-based journalist, Rebecca West.
11. When she began writing for *The Freewoman*, Cicely Fairfield adopted the pen name Rebecca West. See the Note on the Manuscript for more details of West's earliest writing and of the dating and identification of the manuscript.
12. *Scotsman*, 16 Oct. 1907, 9.
13. Written in 1909. See Bonnie Kime Scott's *Selected Letters of Rebecca West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 8. Several letters describe suffrage events.
14. The first number of the paper, established by Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, came out in Oct. 1907.
15. *Votes for Women* (25 June 1909), 855.
16. See the biographies by Victoria Glendinning and Carl Rollyson (*Rebecca West: A Saga of the Century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995)) for more details.
17. Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 37. The Fabian society, founded in 1883-4, aimed to establish a socialist state in Britain by peaceful means. Its earliest members included George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells.
18. Quoted in Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 35.
19. In an interview in 1972, West declared: 'I had an impossible name. I don't think anybody could really be taken seriously as a writer under the name of Cicily [sic] Isabel Fairfield. It sounds like something blonde and pretty, like Mary Pickford'. Having discovered that the article she had sent to *The Freewoman* was to be used on the advertising poster and fearful of her mother discovering she was involved

- in a forbidden activity, she had to act in a hurry: 'I had the Ibsen play with me: and I just said: "Oh, call me Rebecca West". So it appeared: an article on Mrs Humphry Ward by Rebecca West, and I was committed for life to that rather harsh name'. See 'Dame Rebecca West talks to Anthony Curtis about social improvements and literary disasters', *The Listener* (15 Feb. 1973), 211–13.
20. Brash reviews and outspoken opinions, begun at the *Freewoman*, won her the attention of the anti-suffragist Mary Humphry Ward: Edwardian uncles Wells and Shaw, the transitional modernist Ford Madox Ford and the modernists D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. See Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), i. 43.
 21. Much of her journalism has not been collected and remains scattered through an array of papers and magazines, covering a period of over 60 years.
 22. Most of her early correspondence, especially with Letitia Fairfield, is now held in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, I: 2–10.
 23. See West's *Family Memories: An Autobiographical Journey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) for the striking similarities between Adela's story and her own family history.
 24. In general, women who supported the demand for the vote through non-militant means were known as suffragists, while the suffragettes were associated with militancy. There are numerous helpful accounts of early 20th-cent. feminism (see the Select Bibliography).
 25. 13 Oct. 1905. They were subsequently imprisoned. Annie Kenney was a Lancashire mill worker who rose to prominence in the WSPU.
 26. Veronica Fawcett, the name of the heroine in the abandoned piece 'The Mink': ostensibly written by 'Anne Telope', recalls both H. G. Wells's *Anne Veronica* and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Both names suggest a sense of feminist rebelliousness. The young Rebecca's penchant for pen names, evident in her correspondence with her sisters where pet names are often used, highlights at this early stage two central impulses in her writing—literary aspiration and feminist commitment. The self-conscious act of naming herself suggests not only playfulness but also a serious attempt to represent herself as an author.
 27. According to Rebecca West's niece, Alison Macleod (Selford), both Winnie and Lettie addressed meetings standing on soap boxes and at street corners. She recalled the terrible assaults meted out to the suffragettes and the practice of kicking their ankles devised by the police to make them struggle more and therefore necessitate arrest. Winnie also described how she was careful not to get arrested as she contributed her income as a school teacher to supporting the family. (Conversation with Alison Macleod, 5 Nov. 1996.)
 28. Brian Harrison, 'Conversation with Dr Letitia Fairfield on 17 February 1977', 1. Details about Lettie's suffragette experiences are to be found in a number of interviews. The typescripts of these are now held at the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine, GC/193.
 29. She refers to 'the wasteground round the Jewish hospital at Manchester'. The postcard is dated 31 Jan. with no year. Since it is addressed to Lettie at 'Fairliehope' in Hampstead Garden Suburb where the Fairfields settled around April 1910, the postcard could have been written in 1911, but no earlier. Lilly Library, Indiana University, I: 2–10.

30. 'Interview with Dame Rebecca West at 48, Kingston House North, Princes' Gate, London, SW7 on 15 August 1974'. I am grateful to Professor Harrison for discussing his interview with West and for supplying me with a copy of the transcript of this interview.
31. Linda Walker, 'Interview with Dr Letitia Fairfield on Sunday, March 28 1976', 10. Letitia Fairfield Papers, Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine.
32. Sheila Macdonald, who helped catalogue West's papers after her death, confirms the importance of Letitia Fairfield to this manuscript. In a letter to me she suggested there may have been some collaboration between West and Lettie in the writing of *Adela* (3 Sept. 1997).
33. Kollyson, *Rebecca West: A Saga of the Century*, 13.
34. Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 30. West's important friendship with Mary Gawthorpe is touched on by a variety of critics. A 1920 article notes that West 'had the good fortune to be thrown in contact with Mary Gawthorpe when she was still a schoolgirl, and that witty and lovable and courageous personality made her understand the character of the Feminist Movement and realise that this certainly was inspired by spiritual beauty and sound sense' (*Time and Tide*, 9 Feb. 1923), 150. Bonnie Kime Scott makes the interesting suggestion that 'It may be Gawthorpe's influence that made the Fabian, utopian H. G. Wells such an attractive figure to the young West' (*Refiguring Modernism*, i. 39).
35. There are striking similarities between some aspects of the *Sentinel* narrative and the details of Mary Gawthorpe's life, given in her autobiography *Up Hill to Holloway* (Penobscot, Maine: Travesty Press, 1962).
36. Harrison, 'Interview with Dame Rebecca West, 1974', 3. In the 1976 interview with Linda Walker, Lettie again describes Mary Gawthorpe with great enthusiasm and notes that 'Cissy [sic] knew her well' (typescript of interview with Dr Letitia Fairfield on Sunday, 28 Mar. 1976, 10).
37. Lilly Library, Indiana University, also published in Scott, *Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, 6.
38. Both pro- and anti-suffrage novels made use of the convention, for example in Elizabeth Robins's *The Convert*, H. G. Wells's *Anne Veronica*, and Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally*. West returns to this practice in *The Judge* where she recreates the Pankhursts, this time in a more ironic light as 'Mrs Orniston, the mother of the famous rebels Brynhild, Melissa, and Guendolen' (*The Judge* (London: Virago, 1980), 50).
39. Britomart was the name of Edmund Spenser's chaste female knight in *The Faerie Queen*. The image of the chaste female knight, Joan of Arc in particular, was popular among suffragettes. For more on suffragette icons, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920* (London: Virago, 1985), 266, and Lisa Tickner, 'The Spectacle of Women': *Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987).
40. Psyche, meaning 'soul'. See Explanatory Note 198.
41. Harrison, 'Interview with Dame Rebecca West, 1974', 3.
42. For brief biographical accounts of the lives of these women, see Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928* (London: Routledge, 1999).

43. See also Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938).
44. Other suffrage novels that West might have read before or during the composition of her own novel are included in the Select Bibliography.
45. Critics who discuss this in more detail include Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, and Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago, 1994).
46. Glenda Norquay, *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women's Suffrage Campaign* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 12.
47. Stylistically and thematically the first section of the novel is closer to other early fragments of fiction, 'The Minx' and 'Ellen Yaverland' (held in the University of Tulsa Archive), that may have been written well before 1909 and could be classified as West juvenilia. The central schoolgirl figures owe more to the schoolgirl fiction Adela despises in *The Sentinel* than West might have cared to admit. The clearly autobiographical sulky, adolescent heroines, who meet attractive older men, are nevertheless prototypes for the central figures in *Adela* and later in *The Judge*.
48. These incidents are strikingly similar to those described in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915). Rachel Vinrace is both sexually attracted to and repulsed by Richard Dalloway. The revelation of her own sexuality is in some way paralleled by her awareness of the profession of the women who haunt Piccadilly. Adela's discovery of her own sexual responsiveness is also juxtaposed with her discovery of the existence of prostitution. More specifically, there is an oblique suggestion in the narrative that Adela becomes an object of exchange between her aunt, who wants a particular design from the architect Neville Ashcroft, and Ashcroft, who wants Adela (see the end of Chapter III in Book I).
49. Anne Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 3. Other useful accounts of the New Woman include Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women*, and Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, 'Home Rule: The Colonies of the New Woman' in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, ii: *Sex Changes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 47–82. See also Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the 'fin de siècle'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995) and *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), and Juliet Gardiner, *The New Woman* (London: Collins and Brown, 1993).
50. See Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875–1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), 166.
51. Pykett, *Engendering Fictions*, 20.
52. These theories contributed to contemporary debate about femininity and feminism, having been extrapolated from readings of Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary theory. Notions of degeneration and its links with femininity became topical in the late 19th century. For more details, see Pykett, *Engendering Fictions*, Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, and William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
53. 'The elusive quality of the New Woman of the *fin de siècle* clearly marks her as a problem, as a challenge to the apparently homogeneous culture of Victorianism which could not find a consistent language by which she could be categorised and dealt with'. See Ledger, *The New Woman*, 11.
54. It is possible that West based this incident on her own experience or that of someone known to her (the initials A. and N. recur in both *Adela* and *The Sentinel*). There is no reference to any comparable incident in either of the West biographies, although, curiously, West does mention the 'little Architect [*sic*]. To whom I send my love', in an early undated letter to Lettie (Lilly Library, Indiana University), but the reference is obscure and gives little away.
55. 'Women were to become a force in the public sphere, to take over and control the public arena by the strength of their superior morality. This naturally meant a rigorous purity in regard to sexual matters, combined with a strong sense of bodily control' (Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 252). The most extreme example of this doctrine appeared in 1913 in Christabel Pankhurst's *The Great Scourge and How to End It*. Writing for the *New Freewoman* by this time, West was unsympathetic towards the attitudes voiced there.
56. Robert Langlad's working-class habits jar on Adela's middle-class sensibilities at various points in the novel. West tries to address class issues elsewhere too, especially in relation to her meeting with Agnes's family who live in the East End of London.
57. See Pykett, *The Improper Feminine*, 6.
58. West, 'Spinsters in Art', reprinted in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West 1911–1917*, ed. Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1982), 45. West was an early supporter of Lawrence's writing and after his death she published a tribute, *D. H. Lawrence* (London: Martin Secker, 1930). West shares the concern to depict sexual awakening, desire and its denial with an earlier writer, Kate Chopin, although there is no documentary evidence that she read Chopin's *The Awakening*.
59. Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, 56–7.
60. See Margaret Stetz, 'Rebecca West and the Visual Arts', in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8/1 (1989), 63–78. In her early published fiction she often employs framing devices to represent a certain scene or character: women are framed by windows or doors, looking out (see e.g. *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Judge*). Her non-fiction contains a significant amount of art criticism too, from her musings on paintings by Greuze, D. H. Lawrence and a Dutch Exhibition in *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log*, to her moving analysis of 180 Picasso drawings published in 1954 ('Appreciation', in *Pablo Picasso. A Suite of 180 Drawings* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1954)).
61. Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, 2.
62. Letitia Fairfield related to her niece, Alison Macleod, some of her recollections about her youngest sister's distress at unwanted attentions from men whilst involved in suffragette work. (Conversation with Alison Macleod, 5 Oct. 1996.)
63. 'Nana', *The New Freewoman* (15 June 1913), 26–7.
64. Maud Seppel in *Adela* is similarly beautiful and attracts the admiration of men and women alike. 'To Adela, possessed by the blind infatuation for beauty common to schoolgirls, she appeared to have reached the high tide of miraculosity'. See *Adela* in Till (ed.), *The Only Poet*, 21.

65. 'patterns emerging from suffrage literature indicate a particularly fierce fight in the battle over 'woman'. [...] On such a battleground, how women "appeared"—how their faces, clothes, bodies, voices, actions, lives were depicted—could not be read as neutrally descriptive' (Norquay, *Voices and Votes*, 11–12).
66. Paradoxically, some of the icons of the militant movement, Joan of Arc for example, were more androgynous figures, a combination of the warrior and femininity.
67. See Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 264, and for more details see Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, Tickner, 'The Spectacle of Women': *Imaging of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–1914*, and Janet Lyon, 'Militant Discourse, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War', in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 4/2 (1992), 100–33. The issue of 'dress' or fashion, femininity and feminism remained controversial in post-war feminism and is a theme to which West often returned in her fiction and journalism.
68. Langlad's awakened passion is a revelation to him. In a state of intoxication he experiences his encounter with the sleeping and unguarded Adela as a form of consummation. The scene resembles an overwritten version of Keats's 'On the Eve of St Agnes', romanticizing and dramatizing the moment of perception. See Explanatory Note 205.
69. The most obvious 'mark' on the body to reveal 'vice' is pregnancy. Adela escapes this imprint of 'vice' after her encounter with Ashcroft: 'I know I'm free from detection' (*Sentinel*, 22).
70. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 263. Numerous incidences of violent sexual assault are reported in *Votes for Women*.
71. West's attempt to write about heightened and distorted mental states in this novel anticipates her interest in shell shock and amnesia in *The Return of the Soldier*.
72. In her interview with Brian Harrison about the suffragette movement, West alluded to a 'Small Lesbian relationship [that] became known to her later, which was influential: Vera—and the Honourable Mrs Scarlett' (Harrison, 'Interview with Dame Rebecca West, 1974'). It is possible that she drew on her knowledge of this friendship for her portrayal of the intense friendships in her novel.
73. The use of religious language in relation to motherhood in *The Sentinel* is characteristic of other suffrage fiction and journalism. Later in the novel, motherhood is referred to as a form of crucifixion, an image suggesting links between feminism and martyrdom. See Gilbert and Gubar's discussion of the use of religious rhetoric as a way of showing the women's movement as a religious development ('Home Rule', 68–9).
74. West may also have had in mind George Eliot's novel about betrayal and child-murder, *Adam Bede*.
75. *The Freewoman*, 25 Apr. 1912, reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 37.
76. 'Explorations of motherhood and childrearing, a significant element of many women's experience and a genuine constraint for women without child-care facilities who wanted to campaign, were [...] scarcely evident in suffrage literature' (Norquay, *Voices and Votes*, 12).
77. Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 217.
78. 'Around the beginning of this century infant life and child health took on a new importance in public discussion, reinforced by emphasis on the value of a healthy and numerous population as a national resource.' See Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', in *History Workshop*, 4–5 (Spring 1978), 9. H. G. Wells was involved in promoting the idea of 'The Endowment of Motherhood'.
79. Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', 23.
80. This statement is a direct echo of Fabian ideals. West addresses the issue of motherhood regularly in her early journalism. See Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*.
81. The idealistic celebration of the suffragettes as mothers of humanity ends abruptly here, as the next three pages of the manuscript are unfortunately missing.
82. Jane Marcus reads hunger-strike tactics as a symbolic refusal of motherhood. Jane Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 2.
83. There are striking resonances between West's writing on motherhood and Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour*, published in 1911.
84. Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 31.
85. See Green, *Spectacular Confessions*, 87.
86. Miller, *Rebel Women*, 159.
87. 'Savage Attack by Liberal Stewards', *Votes for Women* (22 Oct. 1909), 54.
88. West refers to this incident a few years later in one of many articles she published on the suffragettes: see 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex–Antagonism' in *The Clarion* (27 Sept. 1912), reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 99.
89. 'The reluctance or inability of pro-suffrage writers to depict the suffragettes' violent actions left a large part of the story of the suffrage movement untold' (Miller, *Rebel Women*, 159).
90. Reprinted in Marie Mulvey Roberts and Tamue Mizula (eds.), *The Militants: Suffragette Activism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1–6.
91. 'A Speech by Lady Constance Lytton Delivered at the Queen's Hall', 31 Jan. 1910, published in *Votes for Women* (4 Feb. 1910), 292.
92. Reprinted in Norquay, *Voices and Votes*, 208.
93. West did make the analogy in an article on Emily Davison for *The Clarion* (20 June 1913). Discussing forcible feeding, she declares: 'But today Jack the Ripper works free-handed from the honourable places of government' (Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 183). See also Djuna Barnes, American journalist and writer, whose article, 'How It Feels to be Forcibly Fed', appeared in the *New York World Magazine* (6 Sept. 1914), 5, 7.
94. Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 14.
95. *The Quiver* was a conservative, low-brow magazine (see Explanatory Note 8).
96. Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson both draw up comprehensive reading lists for their heroines in their early novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Pilgrimage: Pointed Roofs* respectively.
97. Shelley is cited regularly in suffragette fiction and autobiography as a source of revolutionary inspiration (see Flint, *The Woman Reader*). The numerous references to 'scientific' writers such as Herbert Spencer and Belfort Bax, who contributed to the creation of a misogynist scientific discourse defining women, reveal West's early interest in such debates. She challenges these writers later in her articles and reviews published in *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*.
98. Maroula Joannou, 'Suffragette Fiction and the Fictions of Suffrage', in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (eds.), *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 103.

99. Harrison, 'Interview with Dame Rebecca West, 1974'. Gertrude Atherton was an American novelist who created heroines to represent 'a re-vision not only of the roles of women and the relations between the sexes but also of civilization itself and the roles of nature and nurture'. See Claire Buck (ed.), *Women's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992). Max Stirner's philosophy of individualism was an important influence on Dora Marsden, editor of *The Freewoman*.
100. Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 234.
101. 'The publication itself provided information with which to argue one's case; for gaining a historical awareness of the social and political contributions made by generations of earlier women; for reliving contemporary history with the knowledge that one is recording the struggles of the current movement as an inspiration for future generations of women readers; and which acknowledged that reading could provide relaxation' (Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 236).
102. Rebecca West, *The Freewoman* (5 Sept. 1912), 306.
103. Quoted in Wallace Martin, *The 'New Age' Under Orage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 95.
104. See Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Woman's Suffrage Movement* (London: Routledge, 1996), 119.
105. Les Garner, *Dora Marsden: A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: 1882-1960* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990), 93.
106. *The Freewoman* (23 Nov. 1911).
107. *The Freewoman* (30 Nov. 1911), signed Cicily Fairfield.
108. Carol Barash, 'Dora Marsden's Feminism, the *Freewoman* and the Gender Politics of Early Modernism', *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 49 (Autumn 1987), 43.
109. Norquay, *Voices and Votes*, 29.
110. 'The Future of the Middle Classes', *The Clarion* (1 Nov. 1912), reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 111.
111. 'The Sin of Self Sacrifice', *The Clarion* (12 Dec. 1913), reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 235.
112. 'On Mentioning the Unmentionable', *The Clarion* (16 Sept. 1913), reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 206.
113. Lyn Pykett, 'The Making of a Modern Woman Writer: Rebecca West's Journalism, 1911-1930', in Kate Campbell (ed.), *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 172.
114. Barash, 'Dora Marsden's Feminism', 35.
115. West's claim is slightly exaggerated, as the paper had literary connections from the start, primarily through Mary Gawthorpe whose contacts included H. G. Wells, Mrs G. B. Shaw, Katherine Mansfield and Holbrook Jackson: see Robin Hicks, 'Gender of the Self: Dora Marsden and the *Freewoman*: Feminist Beginnings of *The New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*' (M.Litt. Thesis, Oxford, 1990), 80. Gawthorpe's connections with A. R. Orage and *The New Age* were also important. See Bruce Clarke, 'Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound: *The New Freewoman* and "The Serious Artist"', *Contemporary Literature* 33/1 (1992), 95.
116. Rebecca West to Dora Marsden, no date. Dora Marsden Collection, Princeton University, MS H: 26.
117. Rebecca West, *Adela*, in Till (ed.), *Rebecca West: The Only Poet and Other Stories*, 58.
118. 'A New Woman's Movement', *The Clarion* (20 Dec. 1912), reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 133.
119. Rebecca West, *Kaleidoscope: Talks & Documentaries Radio*, Tuesday 15 Mar. 1983 (recorded 1976).
120. West's first reference to Freud appears in a letter to *The Freewoman* in 1912, reprinted in Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca*, 62.
121. Rebecca West, *Adela*, in Till (ed.), *The Only Poet*, 18.
122. Rebecca West, *The Judge*, 202.
123. Louise A. De Salvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 11-12.
124. West and other feminists felt that the partial achievement of votes for women after 1918 had deflected the momentum of feminist aims (the Act of 1918 granted a limited franchise to women over 30).