
Connecting directly to the title of the chapter, this essay deals with the people who experience war; most of the information is focused on the soldiers, although there is discussion of the civilians that are left behind as well. Cole covers the brutality of wars as covered in fiction from World War I through the Vietnam war, but also adds in the peaceful connections that have occurred (for example, the Christmas truce across no-man’s-land). This piece was particularly interesting because of its wide range of literature. The entire book is about war literature and could be a very valuable source for other novels we cover this semester.


Covington reviews the disagreements that occurred at the publishing of *The Return of the Soldier* that West was simply publishing her ideas about Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. She claims that while the novel reads like a case history of a shell-shocked soldier, the use of Jenny as a narrator clearly present West as a “modernist” writer. Jenny’s unreliability and removal from the cure as presented in the novel are important to the medical cases that West was trying to avoid.

Covington argues that “Jenny uses Chris’s memories to tell her own story,” making the novel
more about the female characters. The article presents information about the study of mental illness in soldiers done by Freud, MacCurdy and Rivers. 


This article begins by identifying several critical elements in history that add to the understanding of the novel. Specifically, Cowan discusses the prevalence of war literature being written by combatants following war and how that trend necessarily omitted the voice of women. The Return of the Soldier being printed during the war is significant because specific and actual battles could be remembered as affecting Chris (Battle of the Somme). Cowan has very negative views of Kitty and argues that Chris’s love of Margaret over Kitty is a battle of “material v spiritual”. Ultimately, the argument presented hails the pastoral and denounces class structure. Although this article is 18 years old, it does a fantastic job of presenting ideas not encountered through other articles in this list. 


This brief article discusses the way that Kitty is presented in the text as a controlling and overbearing woman and wife. Edmundson asserts that Kitty is the home version of military control and order. There is specific mention of variations in the printing of the book that show Jenny as hoping that Kitty “would let [Margaret] go without scarring her too much” or “scaring
her too much”. Edmundson give great weight to this single difference in the printings, suggesting two very different versions of Kitty emerging. Nothing definitive is presented. The article is flat with little to offer in further understanding the text or the characters.


When Jenny and Margaret briefly conspire with one another to keep the truth from Chris at the close of The Return of the Soldier, they are stepping into dangerous waters. This article presents the logic behind the generally accepted idea that the truth is always the best policy and relates that formula to the characters in the novel. Hershfield admits that it is a difficult situation to determine the correct path because the ethics involved are murky: actual reality v. happiness and safety. It is interesting to consider the larger societal implications both in fiction and reality. There is compelling evidence on both sides of the argument.


This article presents an interesting idea of the World War I literature printed during and directly following the war as an information infusion to the general public. MacCallum-Stewart argues that while a relatively small number of soldiers returning from war actually experienced shell-shock, it was a loud minority that society found difficulty dealing with. There is further discussion of the differences between female and male authors. Female authors tended to include a love story as an important part of the text and use “strength through adversity” to develop that
plot. Several authors also experimented with the ideas that the soldiers at was experienced “homosocial” and/or homosexual relationships with one another. This article has a more generalized treatment World War I literature and only briefly specifically deals with The Return of the Soldier.


Meyer presents a discussion in which soldiers of World War I, both real and fictional, suffer from shell shock resulting in regression to more youthful times of their lives. Additionally, the concept that shell shock and mental disorders of soldiers are seen as effeminate problems is explored. Masculinity of both the nation and of soldiers as individuals is considered in the arguments presented. The Return of the Soldier is referenced as Chris reverts to a time in his life of his “sexual awakening”, a more youthful and carefree point of his life. Meyer explores the idea that Chris’ recovery from shell shock snaps him back into being a man, a soldier.


This article presents a really interesting idea of Margaret as Chris’ therapôn. Pinkerton argues that Margaret is a kind of double for Chris as their lives have taken similar paths since their courtship ended. Margaret is also presented as a motherly figure to the traumatized Chris, as his memories of her are more innocent and pre-sexual. The conclusion of the novel is discussed and
it is argued that there could be no satisfactory written ending to the text detailing a cure for Chris; this is why West left the novel’s finish more tenuous with Chris simply returning to the posture of a soldier.

Pividori, Cristina. “Eros and Thanatos Revisited: The Poetics of Trauma in Rebecca West’s The

It is argued that to Chris, Margaret is both a listener and an object of intense desire. Over the course of the novel, Margaret is simply there for Chris and provides the “therapeutic power of silence” as he attempts to deal with the situation he finds himself in. Pividori presents the case that Margaret is necessary in allowing Chris to come to terms with the trauma that he is experiencing. Neither Jenny, nor Kitty could fulfill this role due to the idea that Chris was suffering from various trauma prior to going to war (the death of his father, Oliver’s death, loss of young love). This article was not compelling in its argument.

Pulsifer, Rebecah. “Reading Kitty’s Trauma in Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier.”

The idea that Kitty herself was suffering from trauma alongside Chris, and that her trauma was never remedied, is central to the argument presented in this article. Pulsifer discusses Kitty’s inability to fully cope with the death of her son, Oliver. Simply by being a woman, Kitty’s trauma is placed second to that of her husband’s. Another important discussion through this article is the lens with which the novel is narrated. Jenny presents Kitty as self-centered while
admitting her own love for her cousin, Chris. This bias colors the way that Kitty is impressed upon the reader.