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## A Psychoanalysis of Rebecca West's Unfinished Novel The Sentinel

Taylor Vesely

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A Psychoanalysis of Rebecca West's Unfinished Novel *The Sentinel*

by

Taylor Vesely

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of Honors Requirements

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## **Abstract**

This thesis applies a psychoanalytic lens to a little-known and unfinished manuscript by Rebecca West. There is little scholarship on *The Sentinel* but a wealth of knowledge to be gained from it about the complicated psychological dilemmas the suffragists suffered. West was writing at a critical period in feminist history that is still relevant today, and this novel, which would have been her first, lays the groundwork for many of her future works. Her depictions of sexuality, violence, religion, and motherhood provide an excellent framework for both her protagonist's self-suppression and a compelling psychoanalysis. This thesis argues that the many paradoxes produced by Adela Furnival's self-suppression prevented West from finishing the manuscript, especially within the genre conventions of the New Woman novel.

Keywords: suffrage movement, psychoanalysis, self-suppression, masochism, New Woman

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all the cats on the USM campus.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Charles Sumner, for all of his insight and advice. It was an honor and privilege to work with him for this project, and I could not have asked for a better experience. I would also like to thank every English professor I had during my studies at Southern Miss, especially Dr. Craig Carey, Dr. Joyce Inman, and Dr. Alexandra Valint. Thank you all for showing me what it means to be passionate about literature in all of its forms and that English is not a useless major.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Rebecca West, herself a suffragist in Britain in the early 1900s, wrote an unfinished and unpublished novel entitled *The Sentinel*. Only eighteen at the time of writing the manuscript in 1910, this would have been her first full-length novel. In the recovered manuscript, discovered in the 1980s, the suffragist protagonist, Adela Furnival, holds herself to standards of self-denial and suppression while fighting for freedom and liberation, creating a paradox that renders her work self-defeating and meaningless. A psychoanalytic reading of the novel will reveal why this suppression is harmful and self-destructive, and it will help us both to understand this paradox and speculate about why West was unable or unwilling to finish Adela's story.

The paradox of Adela's self-suppression lies in her willingness to fight for freedom while barring herself from personal freedoms. The goals of the suffrage movement that she is so desperate to be involved with differ from the way she treats herself. The suffrage movement stands for liberation, equality, and a woman's right to make her own decisions. Adela's suppression of particular experiences does not reflect the cause that she fights for. Instead, it represents her belief that she must forswear her most intense desires in order to achieve freedom. Psychoanalysis is uniquely equipped to explain this paradox because it allows for an analytic interpretation of just these sorts of contradictions.

The narrative begins with sixteen-year-old Adela Furnival visiting family and meeting a thirty-year-old architect named Neville Ashcroft. She eventually sleeps with him, a turning point for her life that serves as a catalyst for guilt. The manuscript flashes forward to a twenty-six-year-old Adela who has recently inherited a large sum of money, allowing her to quit her teaching job and become a full-time suffragist. In this capacity, she makes many suffragist female friends and male politician friends, all working for women's suffrage. Over the course of

the novel, two men fall in love with Adela and she with one of them, Robert Langlad, though she never pursues the relationships. She and several other women are arrested at a protest. In jail, they perform hunger strikes and endure forced feedings before their release. Adela finds comfort in her young friend Psyche Charteris, a selfless and brave suffragist who always puts the cause before herself. Adela continues speaking at rallies, protesting at organized political events, and is arrested once more. By the abrupt end of the 252-page manuscript, Adela is well entrenched in public protests that will undoubtedly lead to her arrest, and perhaps death, and she has risen through the ranks of the cause to be a well-respected (or despised, depending on the viewer) suffragist.

This thesis will provide a psychoanalytic look at the sexuality, violence, and contradictions of the novel, as well as their relation to feminist literature as a whole insofar as *The Sentinel* is a New Woman novel. The term “New Woman” was used to describe any woman who was “intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting” (Diniejkó n. p.). This term was coined in the 1890s and by the early twentieth century a new literary genre had sprung forth. These New Woman novels “often expressed dissatisfaction with the contemporary position of women in marriage and society. The novels about nonconformist or rebellious women became a springboard for a public debate about gender relations that had previously been taboo” (Diniejkó n.p.). Further still, the mostly female authors writing these New Woman novels were doing so at the same time that the British suffrage movement was gaining increasing momentum.

According to Ann Heilmann, “New Woman writers seem...to have been primarily concerned with getting their politics across” (9). This new genre “always located the conditions of women’s oppression in contemporary social reality” (9). For West, writing this manuscript in

likely 1910, this social reality was the British women's suffrage movement. One critical characteristic of this genre, especially as it applies to *The Sentinel*, is the definition by journalist W.T. Stead, as "fiction *on* New Women [and] fiction *by* New Women" (qtd. in Heilmann 7). Though most New Woman novelists are not well-known today, it is important to understand the foundations on which West was building. Olive Schreiner, "regarded as a pioneer of the New Woman fiction...criticize[d] the traditional gender roles and promote[d] an assertive heroine who [shaped] her life" in her novel *Story of an African Farm* (1883) (Diniejko n.p.). Sarah Grand wrote three novels (*Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), and *The Beth Book* (1897)) that "tell the stories of women who have been trapped into a bad marriage" (Diniejko n.p.). Mona Caird wrote articles for the *Westminster Review* that "criticized the patriarchal ideal of male dominance and female submission" (Diniejko n.p.). West's *The Sentinel* includes many similar themes, likewise marking it as a New Woman text.

Rebecca West was both a New Woman author and an active suffragist, creating several literary characters within this novel who were themselves suffragists. The New Woman genre "dealt frankly with sex and marriage as well as women's desires for independence and fulfillment" (Diniejko n.p.). West's character Adela does indeed show a preoccupation with all of these elements, but West went beyond what most New Woman authors were willing to write about, which typically included female sexuality, scrutiny of gender differences, and challenges to the traditional marriage plot (Laing, "Introduction" xxii). According to Kathryn Laing's introduction to *The Sentinel*, West's depictions of violence were new for suffrage literature ("Introduction" xxxiii). The fact that violence occurs both physically and emotionally in this novel is especially interesting when considered through a psychoanalytic lens. Adela craves the violence of the suffrage movement and incurs emotional violence on herself in her personal

relationships. Each of these aspects of the New Woman genre can be psychoanalyzed in order to understand West's purpose in writing Adela the way she did, and may even allow us to better understand why the novel was left unfinished.

## Chapter 2: Sexuality

To begin this psychoanalysis, a close reading of Adela's sexuality, or often lack thereof, will reveal a great deal about her character and contradictions. My reading will emphasize Adela's tendency for self-suppression, which is the process of consciously denying thoughts, feelings, or motivations for certain actions. In "Paradoxical Effects of Thought Suppression," Daniel Wegner and his team have shown that "attempted thought suppression has paradoxical effects as a self-control strategy, perhaps even producing the very obsession or preoccupation that it is directed against" (5). Indeed, it would seem that Adela's suppression of sexual desire produces a preoccupation with that desire as well as the process of suppression itself. Self-suppression is different than the more well-known self-repression, as repression is an unconscious denial of thoughts, feelings, memories, and actions. Because Adela actively prevents herself from thinking and acting on certain impulses, she is engaging in self-suppression. Wegner's study states that "to repress a thought requires that one (a) plan to suppress a thought and (b) carry out that plan by suppressing all manifestations of the thought, including the original plan. Thought suppression thus seems to entail a state of knowing and not knowing at once" (5). This would explain Adela's suppression of things that lead to a manifestation of thoughts of sexuality: dating, physical contact with men, etc. It also explains why Adela never expressly says to herself that she is suppressing her thoughts.

Wegner's study comes to several more conclusions that are helpful in understanding *The Sentinel*. Adela's preoccupation with the thing she wishes to suppress (sexual desire) is caused by the very fact that she wishes to suppress it. This paradoxical effect is born out of the mind's inability to willingly forget something. As the study states,

The results of these experiments suggest that the portrayal of suppression as the parent of obsession may contain a degree of truth. The process begins when a person attempts to put a particular thought out of mind...The person finds the thought hard to suppress and may soon wonder why this particular thought is so insistent. Continued suppression may eventually remove the thought from mind, for the present. Then, however, some reminder occurs, and in a moment of weakness the person gives license to the rumination. Our results suggest that in this moment, an unusual preoccupation with the formerly suppressed thought may begin. This preoccupation may grow and prosper in the person's mind. And quite ironically, the person who is first most successful in carrying out the suppression may eventually be most susceptible to the resulting obsession. (Wegner 12)

Indeed, Adela's suppression of sexual thoughts and desires seems to form a preoccupation and even an obsession. For Adela, reminders of her sexuality include proclamations of love by the men in her life and her own romantic feelings for them. After one such proclamation, Adela feels guilt about it and cannot stop thinking about her past sexual encounter with Neville Ashcroft. She anxiously relates it to her current status as suffragist: "suppose the enemy learnt of her defilement and shouted it abroad with lewd cries and jeers...she reproached herself for having allowed her spoiled life to stain the procession of chaste women" (West 121). No one had made any comment on her virtue or lack thereof; a man had simply professed his love for her, and yet she is obsessed with how her sexuality will affect the world around her. A reminder has occurred in the form of a man's declaration of love and it causes rumination on Adela's part.

A psychoanalytic reading of Adela's character, then, shows that she is suppressing her sexual desires, becoming preoccupied with them, and is thus inadvertently fueling them.

Wegner's study further concludes that,

...when suppression is transformed into an active interest in a single distracter, the longer term dangers of a rebounding preoccupation with the suppressed thought may be prevented. Returning to a particular idea whenever one worries might provide some reduction in the eventual extent of the worrying. (12)

Perhaps, then, Adela uses the suffrage movement as a distractor from her worries about her sexuality. By consciously turning her thoughts away from what she wants to suppress and instead towards the movement, she is able to worry less about sex. This, however, proves to be yet another paradox. Adela uses the movement to distract herself from sex but constantly feels unworthy of the movement because of her sexuality.

Of course, the most well-known scholar on psychoanalysis is Sigmund Freud, who posited many theories that are useful in a psychoanalytic reading of *The Sentinel*. In fact, Freud believed that "the unconscious was capable of performing the thought suppression for consciousness" (Wegner, et al. 5). Some may believe that a psychoanalytic framework that includes input from Freud's work is inherently antifeminist because of his beliefs about women and sexuality. For instance, in a work titled "The Psychological Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction Between the Sexes," he states that "women oppose change, receive passively, and add nothing of their own" (qtd. in Cherry n.p.). Freud was against the women's suffrage movement, believing that women suffer from penis envy, and that their main function in life revolves around reproduction (Cherry n.p.). However, it is not necessarily antifeminist to employ Freud in an analysis of a feminist piece of literature. As Nancy J. Chodorow, a feminist

psychoanalyst, puts it, “femininity, feminism, and Freud are in many ways related and gain meaning from the other” (165). Taking my cues from Chodorow, I will attempt a reading of *The Sentinel* that resolves the seeming antagonism between feminist and Freudian ideas.

### *Virginity*

Adela Furnival’s ideas about and preoccupations with virginity provide significant insight into her character. Her one instance of physical passion and pleasure, her teenage sexual encounter with Neville Ashcroft, proves monumental for Adela’s self-image. Instead of taking her shame from the event and turning it into a reason to fight for women’s liberation from repressive sexual standards, she uses it to suppress herself. Though Neville expresses his desire to marry her in order to alleviate her regret about their sexual encounter, Adela refuses, claiming that it would be wrong because she does not love him. She is given an opportunity to right what she sees as a wrong, but does not take it because of her own standards and beliefs. Why, then, does she allow this one instance of passion to shape her identity and all future romantic encounters?

Later, the narrator states that Adela “had known nothing but an ignorant and exhausted child’s submission to an adult, expert, violent assault” (West 182). Adela still does not forgive herself even though she recognizes her immaturity and naiveté in an assault-like situation at the hands of an older man. This perception of the event as an assault shapes her views of sex and violence later on. Further still, the very observation of Neville as an “expert” shows Adela’s misconceptions of the event, as the narrator provides a more clumsy and unsophisticated picture of Neville, saying “Adela’s youth...overpowered him with a flood of sensual emotion. He leant



towards her and remained still, in a rapturous physical stupor” (18). According to the narrator, Neville is no more capable of self-control, and thus no more expert at seduction, than Adela is.

Here, there is a need for clarification of the narrator’s identity. In this instance and others throughout the novel, the narrator provides the reader with both Adela’s perspective and additional observations. Thus, Adela should not be too closely identified with the narrator, as the narrator seems to understand more about Adela’s character and situations than Adela herself. For example, when Adela visits Neville, she observes a painting of him that a student has done, and the narrator points out that it was “limned...with a malice that Adela did not detect” (16). The narrator further states that the yellow wallpaper of Neville’s apartment is such that “a healthy man would not have lived with” and that Neville “was a hysterical devotee of the more sensuous forms of religion” (16-17). The narrator is more observant and critical than Adela is, allowing the reader to see what Adela cannot, namely the absurdity of Neville’s home and overall character. Adela is blind to Neville’s intentions, as she is “undeveloped in these feelings” (18). Even so, Adela later blames herself for his influence over her, despite her own ignorance of such circumstances.

Adela often expresses shame and regret about losing her virginity, and keeps it a secret in fear of what others will think. When she first joins the suffrage movement, she asks the leader, Mary Gerald, if the movement will accept her despite her past sexual encounter. She tells Gerald that she has “committed the greatest mistake a woman can commit” (28). Gerald replies that “virginity can be killed by no man – only by one’s own soul” (28). Adela seems to have let her own soul kill her virginity insofar as she is convinced that having sex with a man out of marriage can kill any purity she had. Her obsession with her sexual past creates a paradox in her character – she wants to fight for women’s freedom but does not allow herself to be free. She will not

satisfy her desires despite fighting for the right for all women to do so. She demands freedoms for all, but sacrifices sexual freedom for herself.

### *Self-Imposed Celibacy*

Adela never has sex again after the one instance with Neville. Though she falls in love with a man named Robert Langlad, she does not even tell him of her reciprocated love for fear that it will distract her from her cause, or perhaps make her a hypocrite in the eyes of the movement. She sees herself as a traitor to feminism and the suffrage movement because as a teenager she had a lapse in absolute self-control. She will hold herself to these standards for the rest of her life, as the narrator explains: “to perpetual endurance of this cruel life, unstimulated, undeterred by any ties of human affection, Adela looked forward” (250). According to Laing, Adela’s self-sacrifice is fueled by sexual denial and “her resistance to Robert Langlad” (xxxix). Adela will only be happy if she is resisting happiness. However, she holds only herself and not others to these high standards.

In jail, Adela meets a young girl name Rosie Essletree, who has been arrested for infanticide. Rosie had sex outside of wedlock, but Adela does not condemn her for it. In fact, Adela feels great sympathy for her and often remembers her as a motivation for fighting for suffrage and women’s liberation. She feels guilt and shame for having premarital sex but does not look down on anyone else for having done the same.

Further still, Adela forces celibacy on herself despite desiring motherhood. She even turns down two marriage proposals that would provide her legitimate children. She has several suffragist friends who are married with children but does not think any less of them. Again, she is holding only herself to illogical standards. After a childless woman laments her loneliness,

Adela echoes her, saying “Yes...I wish I had a child” (145). She suppresses her desires for sex and children in order to hold what she believes is the higher moral ground for herself. Leslie Macarthur, a fellow suffragist, has children of her own and admires Adela for not having any. She tells her “You go through all the pangs of childbirth with not a crumb of motherhood to hope for at the end!” (242). Here, Leslie is equating the physical sufferings of imprisonment and forced feedings to the pains of motherhood. To this, Adela replies that she “feel[s] foster-mother of every man and woman of the future” (241). Much time has passed since her comment about wishing to have children, and by this point Adela has reconciled herself to being a figurative mother. She has suppressed her desire for motherhood by turning it into a different kind of motherhood.

While imprisoned and on her hunger strike, Adela again thinks of motherhood. She “wondered if the pangs of maternity were much worse. They were, of course. The abyss of that hell was faintly imaged in her present agonies” (234). Here, Adela has moved on from her desire for motherhood and only thinks on it briefly as being something totally miserable. She is not referencing just childbirth, but maternity as a whole, which she views as so arduous as to surpass the anguish of her current situation. Laing points out the importance of this episode, as being on the hunger strike is “potentially denying herself the possibility of real or spiritual motherhood” (xxxix). Adela is giving up her body for the fight for suffrage, using it as a weapon for feminism by suppressing any present and future desires.

Adela’s fears are often in connection with the past and future use of her body. When a young politician declares her love for her and tries to kiss her, Adela “feared most...the physical repulsion he would feel for her when she told him” (West 118). She never does tell him, though, and keeps on believing that he would have been repulsed by her previous sexual act. When he

tries again to show affection, they suddenly “[turn] away from each other in shame, having glimpsed the profound truth that the love of sexual adventure is ineradicable from the human breast” (119). They both realize here that sexuality is an undeniable facet of their humanity and yet they still feel ashamed by it. Adela wishes to suppress her very nature in order to have complete control over herself, despite the knowledge that sexual feelings are ingrained in her being. This all stems from her guilt about having sex with Neville, as she “feel[s] as one who pays a degrading penance” (119). She is being punished with affection for having accepted affection in the past. When the politician tries to apologize for making her suffer, she responds “oh, it’s my own fault” (119). Adela believes that she has brought on this suffering and deserves it because of her past sin.

As she leaves the politician, she begins sobbing, an act which the narrator describes as “the shocked revolt of a calm body against the unaccustomed insult of passion” (119). She has become so used to denying herself any sort of affection that she now sees passion as insulting and overwhelming. Once again, she suppresses herself, as “her instinctive distaste for all demonstration controlled her and she settled down quietly to find forgetfulness” (119). This forgetfulness that she seeks is actually self-suppression. The irony of a suffragist imposing such strict self-denial while also fighting for freedom is the most telling thing about Adela’s character—she does not desire true freedom, but rather a sort of freedom that conforms to her distorted ideals and is won through authoritarian imprisonment in her own body and mind.

In order to find this forgetfulness, Adela picks up a newspaper to read. She reads an anti-suffrage piece and has a sort of crisis about it. She concludes that what the author of the article is trying to say is “Women, we do not want your nobility, we do not want your courage, your tenderness, your charity, your intuition, we want just one thing!...Your body” (West 120). Adela

then feels as though this is a personal attack against her, because she has given her body to a man once before. She bemoans that “she had no right to be among the host of God, for she had suffered defilement from the enemy” (121). She views the suffrage movement as a “Holy War” in which she is unworthy to fight because she has committed a sin and is unable to properly atone for it (121). The irony is that the writer of the anti-suffrage article reduces women to their bodies and Adela does the same. She does not care about her own courage, intuition, or nobility either, only the fact that she has apparently misused her body. By reading this article and interpreting the movement as holy, Adela has bolstered her idea that chastity is the best thing for her, which only fuels her guilt more. If an article belittling women can have such an impact on Adela’s self-image, one must wonder who really controls Adela’s body. Surely, she cannot truthfully desire liberation if she allows a newspaper to diminish her worth.

### *Hetero- and Homosexuality*

Adela further reduces herself and other women to their bodies throughout the novel by describing them according to their sexuality and sex appeal. For instance, while she is in jail, Adela describes the wardress as having “the dead, flat expression of an unsexed and dehumanized official” (228). She equates lack of sexuality with dehumanization, despite restraining herself from any form of sexuality. By her own logic, then, Adela has dehumanized herself. She goes on to describe the British anti-feminist party as “mainly consisting of over-sexed and degenerate women” (228). Here, she equates anti-feminism with sexuality. Therefore, again following Adela’s logic, she is able to be a feminist because she is “unsexed.” Though she never says it outright, Adela seems to believe that feminism and dehumanization go hand in

hand, which stands in contrast to what the movement is fighting for – equal rights for all human beings.

Though a great deal of this novel shows Adela's preoccupation with sexual virginity, we see that, by the end of the book, she is also concerned with another kind of virginity. As the prison wardresses tear off the male clothing she is wearing, Adela struggles because this particular situation "dictates more of the repulsion of her soul's unconquerable virginity from contact with these indecent women rather than at the bidding of her tortured flesh" (229). She is more concerned with guarding her soul from these women than guarding her body. It seems that, though her sexual virginity is lost, she will not allow anyone to take away her soul's purity. Finally, Adela has made a distinction and separation between her value and her body.

In regard to Adela guarding herself, the title of the novel itself is very fitting. Adela calls herself "the sentinel," revealing that she stands guard against desires and urges (23). She is fighting a battle against herself. She carries the guilt of her affair with Neville throughout the novel, allowing it to control her. Because of this guilt, Adela takes on physically punishing assignments as a way to discipline herself and atone for her sin. During one guilt-stricken moment, she "wanted to cry out, to cut herself, to throw herself from the swinging train as relief from the agonizing thirst of her body" (182). She sees pain as a respite from sexuality. She submits herself to imprisonment, forced feeding, and men "pound[ing] her with full medical artillery" (239). Just as Adela uses her body as a weapon against feminism, the doctors in the prison use her body as a weapon against herself, proving that once again Adela is not in control of her own body. She must suppress herself even as she is attacked by forces both inside and outside her control.

Though Adela guards herself from sexual desires for men, she does not guard as heavily with those for women. She often enjoys looking at women's bodies because they do not threaten her celibacy. She never explicitly thinks of having sex with women, and therefore allows herself to enjoy the sight of their bodies. Adela even admits to herself that she "wished to be a man, so that she could marry a waitress" (151). She describes these waitresses' bodies as "exquisitely moulded... with such superterrestrial gravity of grace" (150). Adela would never let herself think of a man's body in this way, and if she did lapse in self-control and enjoy the sight of a man in a similar way, she would guilt herself for doing so.

Further still, the narrator describes Adela as "always a willing captive to pretty women," and in particular we see Adela's attraction to two specific women – Maud Seppel and Psyche Charteris (154). Maud is so captivating that Adela wonders at "the dreams that men and women dreamed of Maud Seppel" (155). However, Adela does not feel ashamed of her attraction to Maud, because she does not view it as sexual sinfulness. Indeed, Adela imbues her infatuation with a childlike innocence, telling Maud "I always feel as if I was in a kindergarten when I'm with you!" (153). Adela does not view her desire for Maud as a homosexual and romantic desire, because to the outside world Adela and Maud are simply friends. Again, then, Adela has allowed the outside world to shape how she views herself and sinfulness. In addition, Adela is proving herself a hypocrite, as she would undoubtedly dislike it if a man looked at her the way she looks at Maud.

The other woman Adela is infatuated with is Psyche Charteris, who she describes as having "faery, grotesque beauty" (161). However, it is not just Psyche's physical beauty that enamors Adela; she also idolizes her "quaint innocence and freedom from personal passion" and her "unbreakable spirit" (160). Adela is enthralled by Psyche's presence from their very first

meeting and remains so for the duration of the novel. Psyche has different views than Adela, as we see when she says, “that’s why men call us unsexed women – because we’re going to take sex out of the markets!” (164). While Adela views unsexed women as non-human, Psyche views them as feminists who refuse to be objectified, and are therefore more human. Adela is fascinated by Psyche’s “absence of sensuality,” a quality which she is likely jealous of. Adela idolizes Psyche because she is not preoccupied with men or sex, which is what Adela tries her hardest to achieve. The closest she gets to any physical homosexual act is when she and Psyche “would snuggle in each other’s arms and lie cuddling innocently” (216). The narrator describes this act as innocent, but then states that “in the light of day” the pair is “less openly intimate” (216). They know that what they desire from each other is not acceptable in public and the light of day. When Psyche proclaims “I *love* women! Don’t you?” Adela does not answer, but instead feels “the shame that the beloved suffer...” (217). Psyche is again portrayed as innocent and loving while Adela is guilty and ashamed.

Psychoanalytic theory does not have one definitive view of homosexuality – or more accurately for Adela’s case, bisexuality. Freud himself produced contradictory theories of homosexuality, stating that it is not an illness but “a variation of the sexual function” while also saying that it is “caused by a certain arrest of sexual development” (Newbigin 279). Current psychoanalytic debate revolves around the belief that “gender- and sexual-identity are inextricably involved with one another” (282). Thus, in order to understand Adela’s character, we must understand how her sexuality and gender relate to each other. If Adela ultimately thinks of herself as an unsexed and dehumanized woman, what does that mean for her sexuality? If she suppresses her sexuality, what does that mean for her gender identity? It seems clear that in attempting to define herself as a non-sexual woman, Adela has inadvertently allowed for a



bisexual attraction to both men and women, an unconscious sexual deviancy that goes against her self-denial of sexuality.

The self-suppression that we see in Adela's sexuality carries into other aspects of her life, particularly religion and violence, further complicating her character and introducing new contradictions. Her self-suppressive attitude toward sex and love lays the foundation for similar habits and views in all parts of her life, creating a character that lends herself quite productively to a psychoanalysis. Her inner contradictions create a compelling narrative that, though unfinished, invites an abundance of interpretation and attention.

### Chapter 3: Religion and Violence

Adela's inner contradictions are even more interesting when religion and violence are brought into the mix. Adela's twisted conceptions of religion often allow it to intersect with violence, and this distortion leads to a glorification of violence. Such glorification highlights Adela's self-suppressing tendencies, preventing any kind of satisfactory resolution. Employment of religious and violent themes and plot points provide incredible paradoxes that reveal the psychological dilemmas that Adela and other suffragists faced.

#### *Religion*

West makes several religious references throughout the novel, which further complicate Adela's character. Drawing on a religious frame, Adela often refers to her sexuality as sinful, and it is this "sin" that causes her to feel so much guilt. Arguably, Adela's conceptions of religion further confuse her self-image. Indeed, at the very beginning of the novel, before she has sex with Neville, Adela admits to herself that art is "like Love and Sin. I don't understand" (West 6). Adela does not understand love or sin, or their relationship with each other. In her attempts to clarify, she equates heterosexual love with sex, and therefore with sin. We have seen this already when Adela likens the suffrage movement to "the host of God" and deems herself unworthy because of her "defilement from the enemy" (121). The relationship of religion and the suffrage movement is not confined only to Adela, however. Real-life suffragists often "invoked...faith in God as part of the armor of her militancy" (Collette 170). Even so, Adela seems to have a twisted view of religion as well. Her confusion and conflation of earthly and heavenly matters peaks when, in Kathryn Laing's words, Adela portrays "Rosie Essletree, charged with infanticide, as an

earthly Madonna” (“Introduction” xxv). Adela’s view of a woman who killed her baby as a Madonna betrays a corrupted view of the virgin Mary.

This corrupted view emerges again during a lunch with her cousin’s wife, Mrs. George. Mrs. George wonders whether the world benefits from politics and asks Adela “wouldn’t it be better if you would – profess – Christ?” (West 151). Adela is immediately annoyed and begins a rant about how humans have taken the word of Christ and altered it, so that they cannot truly know how to attain atonement and the Kingdom of Heaven. She tells Mrs. George that her “babbling picturesqueness of the Lamb of God” is wrong and that “the only lesson we can learn from...the life of Christ is that those who do not live like the swine must expect crucifixion” (152). She then goes on to claim that she herself has been crucified “more than once – I’m crucifying myself to the miserable petty life” (152). Adela admonishes Mrs. George for presuming an understanding of God, but then goes and does the same thing. She believes that it is necessary to “crucify” herself, that is, refuse happiness and suppress anything that may bring her joy. Instead of letting God tell her how to atone for her sins, Adela herself chooses the best way to atone for her perceived sinfulness.

Still, Adela does not realize that this is a choice she has made. She believes that God is punishing her for having sex, even though she is the one doing the punishing. As she sits in a dank and dark prison cell, “she knew herself ill-used and denied by God: it seemed an excessive punishment for a sin from which, first to last, she had derived so little enjoyment” (234). Her own actions as a defiant suffragist are what got her put in this jail cell, yet she blames God. Further, the reason she became a suffragist who desires sacrifice was to serve as penance for a sin she admits she did not even enjoy committing. She still cannot see that she is punishing,

suppressing, and condemning herself according to her own interpretation of the gravity of her sin.

Not only does Adela create her own penance, she also creates her own god. After three weeks of forced feeding and a lonesome prison cell, Adela longs for Robert Langlad, the man who she loves but rejects. The narrator states, “Langlad had become to her weakness a sort of religious personality; he dominated her being in that invisible, powerful way. As she sank into utter debility, she sometimes found herself saying her prayers to him” (237). This proves that her attempts to suppress thoughts about Robert actually cause an obsession, one that combines with religion to form an idolization of a false god.

Psychoanalytic scholarship on religion is, predictably, quite vast. Freud approached the concept of religion as a neurosis, one that is used to explain things we do not understand (Jones 124). More contemporary scholarship views religion as a connection between our inner selves and the outside world, classifying it among “transitional phenomena” (Jones 124). These phenomena are present in the individual as such:

The believer clearly brings his or her personal and subjective experience to the process of believing, but faith is not purely subjective. Its contents are grounded in the traditions and experiences of others in an organized community and relate to the nature of the world, of human existence, of value, and of the presence of the spiritual realm. (124)

So, then, Adela’s religious beliefs are tied to the world she lives in and the people around her.

We never see her attending religious functions, and we know very little about her childhood.

Therefore, we must use what we know: she is a suffragist, surrounded by other suffragists, and often faces opposition for her beliefs. It is not hard to understand, knowing her tendency to self-suppression, why Adela might find herself, under extreme hardship, praying to a man she loves

and yet does not allow herself to attain him. If this sort of religious subversion can occur in Adela's mind, then the paradox of self-suppression and being her own moral judge makes more sense.

One particular religious aspect that Adela engages with is the concept of martyrdom. In fact, many of the suffragists in the novel seem preoccupied with becoming martyrs. This concept is interesting in terms of Adela's self-suppression because she so lacks the desire for actual freedom that she does not even desire to be alive for it when it is finally attained. She and Psyche in particular desire a martyrdom for their cause as if they were saints dying for God. This shows once again that Adela has a twisted view of religion: she believes so fiercely in her cause that she relates it to God, and yet would rather view the results of their fight from the afterlife. West did not finish the novel, so we do not see the ending or Adela's fate, but it is clear that Adela would not know what to do with the freedoms she has fought for if she were to live to see their fruition.

#### *(Glorification of) Violence*

Martyrdom is only one example of the ways in which Adela and the book itself glorify violence. Adela both uses violence and desires that it be used against her. The former occurs almost exclusively in romantic and sexual situations. For example, Adela is having a conversation with Robert and realizes that "willfully she was using the sexual influence she exerted over him – a weapon, she reflected, suitable for the subjugation of the over-excited and the unbalanced" (West 181). Here, Adela weaponizes her sexuality. Instead of suppressing it like usual, she uses it to control Robert despite believing him overly excited and unbalanced. However, as she stares at him after this conversation, Adela feels aroused and suddenly "fear overpowered her: she felt ill, passionate, unhappy, drowsy, sick...She turned to consideration of

her physical excitement. Its violence terrified her” (182). Almost instantly, Adela goes from the attacker to the victim of the sexual violence. The memory of sex has proved so traumatic for her that she views and feels any form of sexuality as a violent assault.

Perhaps, though, Adela is right to fear sexual desire for and from men as violent. When Adela rejects Robert because she “could not bear to show him her real degradation,” he grows angry with her (194). He cries out to her, “for God’s sake, do something!...Can’t you see I want to hurt you? I know it isn’t pretty, but I want to kiss you, crush you in my arms” (195). So Adela is not the only one who equates love with violence here. Unlike Adela, though, the narrator tells us that Robert’s nature is “singularly childlike in its lack of self-analysis” (195). Whereas Adela overanalyzes herself to the point of erroneous conclusions, Robert does not analyze his actions at all, blaming Adela’s seeming lack of desire for him not on his show of violence but on “clipping [his] g’s and saying ‘nowt’” (195). Also unlike Adela, his “revulsion of feeling against the animalism of the sexual impulse that was overriding his virginity” turns out to be “only a phase” and he soon feels no shame as he realizes the “legitimacy of his love” (195). Robert is not ashamed of his sexuality because he loves Adela, but Adela is ashamed and afraid despite loving him back.

Later, as she is being physically attacked by the public, Adela is forced to defend herself with physical violence, which “had the disadvantage of being wholly alien to her character, but was under the advantage of being directed by a cold, steady temperament” (203). Unlike the sexual violence she enacts, she is able to control this violence in order to defend herself. In this altercation, she suffers a severe wound to her breast, which becomes a physical manifestation of her inner struggle. As she suffers, she fails to suppress herself, and cries out multiple times “I want Robert Langlad!” (206). The physical toll on her body overcomes the emotional fortitude

she usually has, and she “curl[s] up for his arms, her head dropped languorously on her throat, her mouth pouted for his kisses” (206). She cannot suppress herself in this moment of weakness and thus gives in to her desires, as she “played surrender to his rough siege” (206). Even when desiring Robert’s comfort and pity, she views it as a violent attack. It would seem that Adela is incapable of any positive emotions or reactions to the physical desire of a man.

However, she is capable of positive feelings when desiring women, specifically Psyche. When Psyche is strangled in the same altercation in which Adela sustains her breast wound, Adela sees “a white rose” of saliva on her lips (203). This delicate view of a result of extreme violence energizes Adela so that she can protect Psyche and take down her attacker. Psyche’s endurance of violence often inspires Adela, as she believes that Psyche “had no fear of defeat... The thought of her warlike future willed her with exultation; in the pleasing delirium of contented drowsiness she felt infinitely noble, heroic, picturesque” (166). Adela idolizes Psyche in such a way that she is able to glorify violence. She fears the sexual violence of men but admires violence in women.

Psyche is so comfortable with violence and suffering that she awes Adela in a way that inspires courage in Adela. After their violent attack, Psyche mutters, “It hurts so, I can’t swallow...but just think, the bruises are purple and green!...So it’s only wearing the colours” (216). Psyche has glorified violence in a way that she can be proud of its affliction, equating her bruises to a suffragist flag. Adela’s reaction to this is one of admiration. The narrator tells us “courage like that was alien to her. Acceptance of pain was one thing: but glorification of pain was above her. It was an extraordinary efflorescence of spiritual bravery and beauty, like those visitations of the divine that sometimes lifted the [mists] of sin in the Middle Ages” (216). Adela thinks that Psyche’s glorification of violence is so incredible that she in turn glorifies it

herself. She likens Psyche's actions to a religious miracle, proving that she believes the glorification of violence is a good, even great thing. Her preoccupation with religion resurfaces and intersects with both the glorification of violence and homosexual attraction.

Psyche, as we have already seen, not only inspires Adela but also attracts her. Adela views her as "less a girl than a weapon in the cause of Liberty" (199). Immediately after equating her to a weapon, the narrator describes Psyche's physical beauty, which "arrest[s] attention" through "the skin of her brilliant face, [and] her slim body swayed perpetually as she spoke" (199). Psyche's body is both a tool for violence and a thing of beauty, and she thereby links the two.

The glorification of violence by Adela and her companions leads to the desire for suffering and imprisonment. Specifically, suffragists endured and even aspired to hunger strikes, forced feedings, and, ultimately, death. These protests, in the eyes of these women, would help them in their cause for women's suffrage. If they could show the world that they are willing to be imprisoned and deny themselves basic necessities, then they could prove that they are deserving of votes and freedom. This contradiction of means and end was not lost on the author during writing, however. One male supporter and friend of the suffragists, Ignaz Lodovsky, points out the irony of their desires for suffering, saying, "I wish they would dare to be happy instead" (186). This comment shows the lengths to which these suffragists are willing to go in order to obtain their goals, even if it means suffering in order to achieve happiness. What Ignaz does not realize, though, is that suffragists like Adela and Psyche are able to find happiness within that suffering. Ignaz makes another comment that serves as a good characterization of these women, saying, "Let us be cheerful over our martyrdoms...Here is the beautiful young animal who will one day be torn limb from limb by the murderers of Liberty" (187). Ignaz, of course, is mocking



the women for their seemingly absurd willingness to be violently killed in the name of the cause, but in doing so he identifies the contradiction well. These women would indeed be glad to be torn limb from limb for the sake of liberty.

Perhaps the most infamous and interesting way these women desired to suffer was through hunger strikes and forced feeding. The narrator allows us to see it from the suffragists' perspectives, calling it "that supreme manifestation of the heroism of liberty-seeking humanity, the hunger strike" (199). These women turned to hunger strikes because imprisonment was not enough of a message; according to Adela, "the public was getting used to women suffering in prison as they had become used to women suffering outside prison. That tranquil attitude, pleasing as it was to the devil, must be destroyed" (199). The women then conduct hunger strikes and eventually endure forced feedings in order to capture the attention of the public. No one will take them seriously if they do not submit to these forms of violent torture. In thinking of this, Adela, true to her character, assigns a religious aspect to it, claiming that the devil is pleased that the people would ignore them unless they starve themselves.

Adela willingly commits "indictable offenses" in order to be arrested, and she and the other suffragists have everything planned out weeks in advance (200). As the time of their planned imprisonment approaches, Adela realizes she is apprehensive about the forced feeding. She is gripped by "the fear that forcible feeding might have fatal results. She could not face Death without having told Langlad that she loved him" (200). So she is not apprehensive about the feeding itself but rather that it might mean she will never be able to reveal her feelings to Robert. And again she associates her religious beliefs with physical sufferings, as "what she feared was his physical repulsion, not his spiritual loathing, which might torment her in Eternity" (200-1). Adela has an uncharacteristic moment of self-awareness here, as she realizes that she

actually feared Robert not finding her attractive anymore, rather than his moral condemnation of her. This is the closest she comes to realizing that any of her beliefs and convictions are perhaps distorted.

Adela writes a love letter to Robert, but it is only to be delivered to him after her death. In writing this letter, she attempts to present herself in an unbiased way, something she has never allowed herself to do before. The narrator tells us “from the shadow of death she thought she might excuse herself for her life; so she presented the story of her life with the extenuations her living pride might have withheld” (201). To end the letter, she tells Robert, “I am sick with dread of death, lest in the passing I shall lose any part of my love for you!” (201). She only fears death because of her love for Robert, not because of the physical suffering that will lead to it. Though this is what she says she fears most, perhaps even more frightening to her is the thought of revealing her feelings while she is alive.

Adela does survive her imprisonment and forced feedings, and thus Robert never receives her love letter. Nor is Adela particularly joyful at her release from prison as the text states “she did not rejoice” at the news of her release, and we learn through analysis of later events that she in fact likes imprisonment (239). The manuscript ends a page and a half into Book III, in which Adela is running from a mob during a political rally. She wields a casing from a lamp at the mob, without any real intention of using it, before she is taken away by four policeman. At the sight of these policeman, Adela says to herself, “Thank God” (251). The last remaining paragraph of the manuscript details Adela as “smiling dreamingly” at the crowd that watches her arrest (252). She is clearly happy to be taken into custody and lose her personal freedoms as a demonstration to the onlooking public.

## *Masochism*

Because of her desire for suffering, Adela can be said to possess a masochistic personality. In “Religion and the Theory of Masochism,” Stuart L. Charmé outlines six facets of masochism: “1) a distortion of love, 2) a need for punishment, 3) a payment for future rewards, 4) a strategy of the weak or powerless, 5) a flight from selfhood, or 6) an effort to be an object for others” (221). Adela embodies each of these categories. As we have seen, she distorts love into something that is harmful; feels the need to punish herself; suffers as a payment for the future reward of equality; uses her suffering as a strategy because of her powerless status as a woman; flees from her true desires and identity; and acts as an object that others control. Charmé further states that “throughout history...masochism in its various forms has provided a means of dealing with such universal experiences as powerlessness, helplessness, and guilt” (221). Indeed, Adela is powerless in the eyes of the government and the law; helpless at the hands of Neville Ashcroft; and guilty as a result of sex. What is not universal, however, is the extremes to which Adela’s masochism affects her life.

Adela also seems to practice asceticism, but not for the usual religious reasons. Asceticism is defined as “the practice of strict self-discipline as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline...rigorous abstention from self-indulgence” (Merriam-Webster). As we have seen, Adela has a twisted concept of religion and practices self-repression for non-spiritual reasons. Ann Belford Ulanov separates those who practice asceticism for religious reasons from ascetic masochists, stating that “the masochist is avoiding reality while the religious saint uses suffering or submission to discover new values and new levels of personal development” (qtd. in Charmé, 231). Because Adela’s ideas of masochistic suffering only get more extreme with her glorification of violence, it would seem that she is not discovering new

values or levels of personal development, and is instead avoiding reality. William James cites several reasons for the practice of asceticism, several of which apply to Adela, including “an effort to expiate sin and relieve guilt... a desire for purity, an expression of personal hardiness, and a perversion that finds pain enjoyable” (qtd. in Charmé 232). All of this, of course, stems from her guilt about sex with Neville, something for which she feels the need to suffer, repent, and never repeat.

Adela’s enjoyment of suffering and imprisonment lead to several conclusions about her end goals. It would seem that Adela does not desire actual liberty, but just the idea of it. The text even explicitly states that she is “a woman who had dared torture and sickness for the idea of Liberty” (West 243). Adela never considers or hopes to actually obtain and enjoy liberty, only the sufferings she is willing to endure for the idea of it. By the end of the novel, she has resigned herself to constant suffering, as “physical pleasures were meaning less and less to her every day... To perpetual endurance of this cruel life, unstimulated, undeterred by any ties of human affection, Adela looked forward” (249-50). All of this seems to be a result of her denial of love, as in prison she realizes that “she was imprisoned from love itself: her love had no part in this battle... Though Love is the supreme experience of the human entity there are things it cannot—dare not touch” (231). Adela feels that her new existence, this life of imprisonment while fighting for freedom, has no place or need for love, and therefore she does not either. She has no need for something that brings her joy because she has resigned herself to a life of hardship.

Rebecca West herself was never imprisoned or force fed, but she portrays the experience in vivid detail. According to Laing, 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 1909” (“Introduction” xxxiii). The British National Archives website has a collection

of similar accounts by suffragists, including a newspaper article stating that “Indignation and passionate protest are the order of the day inside prison as well as out” (“The Suffragette”). Laing also states that West’s depictions of violence were new for suffrage literature, and that West’s story went against the femininity and womanliness that the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), of which West was a member for a time, wanted to convey (“Introduction” xxxiii). The novel, of course, was also unfinished and unpublished, meaning the members of the WSPU never read it.

Adela Furnival’s self-suppression, distortion of religion, and endurance and seeking of violence prove too paradoxical to culminate in a resolution for the novel, and instead render the manuscript unfinished. West had created a character so complex and contradictory as to desire both violence and freedom, and these desires work against each other, the end result of which we will never know. Adela would remain buried until the manuscript’s recovery in the 1980s, more than seven decades after West first began writing her.

## Chapter 4: Unfinished

West, as far as we know, did not give any explanation as to why she left her manuscript unfinished and did not pursue publication, which opens room for speculation. One reason may be the paradox of Adela's beliefs and of the suffrage movement. She enjoys imprisonment and views it as its own victory, and thus in a way she desires her own failure because she views it as a victory. This is mirrored in certain other suffragists, including Psyche, who's "warlike future filled her with exultation" (166). Psyche enjoys suffering and altercations with the enemy, because she "had no fear of defeat. The aggressive act itself was a victory" (166). Here it is clearly stated that a violent defeat is in itself a victory. If Adela idolizes both Psyche and violence, then she too must view violent defeat as victory. If they conflate victory and defeat, then they do not actually want to vote. Adela seems to have lost sight of the end goal and has focused too much on the means to that end. Adela never contemplates what exactly she would vote for if they were to obtain the vote, but instead focuses on the vote only as an end in itself and not a means to an end. If West could not imagine what Adela would do with the vote, it would make sense that she was unable or unwilling to continue her story. Just as Adela could not imagine what to do with the vote, West could not imagine what to do with Adela.

Carl Rollyson, in his biography *Rebecca West: A Life*, points out that West herself was "an arch opponent...of every orthodoxy that denied human differences and individual autonomy" (11). Knowing that Adela was not in control of her own body, but rather allowed others to control it, provides another possibility for her unfinished story. How could West, who so strongly believed in individual autonomy, think of an ending for a character who does not? Rollyson further described West as "a marriage of contradictions, a feminist, a mistress, and a dutiful wife" (11). It would seem, however, that she could not imagine her protagonist as being

equally multifaceted and therefore could not represent an ending in which her character is allowed free play.

In her introduction, Kathryn Laing adduces several more possibilities for West's abandonment of the novel. The simplest is that, because of "the problems of writing about very contemporary events," West simply did not know how the suffrage movement would end and thus how her book should end ("Introduction" xxxviii). Laing also proposes that West was "dissatisfied with the narrative itself," as Adela had become almost a two-dimensional character, "a mere vehicle for the apprentice novelist's newest ideas and theories" ("Introduction" xxxix). Perhaps, then, West was trying to do too much with a single character, and Adela therefore became rather flat. In a separate article, Laing points out all the ideas West is writing about:

...the indictment of contemporary educational practices and the social inequalities of class and gender, allusions to the 1905 Russian Revolution, and discussions of vegetarianism and vivisection, colonization and Empire, religion, the medical treatment of women, and the nature of womanliness and motherhood...militant rhetoric of the suffragettes and the scientific analyses of the eugenicists...new theories and technologies. ("The Sentinel" 12)

Thus, it would seem quite plausible that West was simply trying to tackle too much, and Adela as a single character could not hold all that West wanted her to contain. Instead of being the marriage of contradictions that West was, Adela became a paradoxical impossibility, unable to fight or concede with any real clarity of character.

Laing also points out the contradictions of the story as a whole, saying "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"

(“Introduction” xl). In attempting to discuss and provide judgment on too many issues, West created a confused motivation and psychology for Adela, leading to an inconceivable future for both the character and the suffrage movement.

Laing states that West’s own ideas and beliefs were shifting at the same time of writing this novel, and that “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” (xxxix). The book ends with Adela’s choices endangering her life, and according to genre conventions, she could either submit to “domestic bliss” or die from her hunger strike (xxxix). West could not commit to either of these options, or, apparently, imagine a third option for her heroine. When Laing’s argument is seen through the psychoanalytic lens, it is clear that Adela was too psychologically entangled in her own self-suppression to produce any real conclusion.

Laing also addresses West’s involvement in the WSPU, which was beginning to deteriorate. This is interesting because 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” (xl). Perhaps, then, Adela’s character reflected what West was seeing around her, and as she grew critical of the organization, so she did with her character. Laing cites West as lamenting “the strange uses to which we put our new-found liberty!” (qtd. in Laing xl). West would not want to publish a story in which the heroine is also using liberty for strange purposes. Perhaps it is for this reason also that West began writing this manuscript under a pseudonym. It is interesting, though, that this is not mirrored in Adela’s character, as Adela does not question the original cause she joined or the allegiances she made with fellow suffragists.



It must be mentioned, for the sake of fairness to the author, that West did not entirely abandon Adela. In fact, she began a rewrite of her story, simply titled *Adela*, but this too went unpublished until after West's death. Ultimately, Laing concludes, "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*...[and] *The Judge* (xlii). Both of these stories address similar concepts as in *The Sentinel*, but neither address them all at once. In addition to themes of love and desire, I argue that *The Judge* has even more in common with *The Sentinel*. *The Judge*, published twelve years after the writing of *The Sentinel*, features a "victimized heroine" named Ellen Melville who is only seventeen when she meets and falls in love with an older man (Ray 299). Ellen is a suffragist and the novel incorporates Freudian Oedipal themes (297). Clearly, West was still thinking about the suffrage movement and psychological motivations for her characters. Another work of West's, "Indissoluble Matrimony," challenges traditional ideas of women in politics and the home. The main character, George, feels emasculated by his wife Evadne, who is a socialist, strong female character. West continued to write politically active and independent women. Thus, Adela's conflicts and beliefs do not die with her, but evolve into different characters. Though Adela's ending was never brought to light, she lives on as an influence in West's other works. After all, West was only eighteen when working on her first novel, and was likely still figuring out her voice and writing style.

This timeframe makes the analysis of this manuscript that much more important, because West would later be called by Time Magazine "indisputably the world's no. 1 woman writer" and be featured on the cover (qtd. in Svendsen n.p.). She was a journalist, literary critic, novelist, suffragist, and remained active in politics throughout her life, and "over one-third of her work

was published posthumously” (Svendsen n.p.). *The Sentinel* reveals an early participation in political writing and is part of that third published after her death. West critiqued powerful literary critics like James Joyce and Henry James and covered Apartheid in South Africa and the Nuremburg Trials (Svendsen n.p.). Her extensive subjects and writing forms mark West as a substantial literary figure who deserves more attention in scholarly study than she currently gets. Studying *The Sentinel*, one of her earliest writings, and, indeed, earliest full-length novel, is critical to understanding the scope and foundations of West’s career.

This manuscript lends itself quite productively to a psychoanalysis, especially its main character. This psychoanalysis bolsters Laing’s claims, expanding them to include psychological motivations of both the author and her character. Adela’s experiences with, reactions to, and subsequent suppression of her sexuality (and that of others), violence, and freedom culminate in a myriad of contradictions. The paradox that is Adela, and the story itself, does not, however, lend itself to any kind of satisfactory ending. The manuscript’s ultimate abandonment can ultimately be contributed to the author’s overabundance of ideas, an overabundance that, while increasingly compelling as the story unfolds, eventually renders Adela’s struggles fruitless and her desires unfulfilled. West’s efforts, on the other hand, were not ultimately in vain. This manuscript gives us a look into the writer’s mind as she was just starting out, and, as Kathryn Laing says, it is “an astonishing early work, containing the seeds of almost everything West was to write over her long and successful career” (“Introduction” xiv). Adela’s legacy, in this way, is not unfinished, but is realized through other characters of West that we are able to know, love, and even psychoanalyze.

West’s complex story of a self-suppressing suffragist who entangles herself in distorted ideas of sex, religion, motherhood, violence, suffering, and freedom adds a new dimension to the

New Woman genre. West both expands and rejects conventions of the genre, giving us a feminist character who denies her own feminist ideals through self-suppression. West's depiction of a masochistic suffragist surrounded by both people who love her and hate her gives us an indispensable insight into the psyche of a woman who embodies such great paradoxes that she is the antagonist to her own goals. *The Sentinel* is a unique novel about militant feminism and the women who suffered for freedoms, despite, and perhaps because of, its abandonment.

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