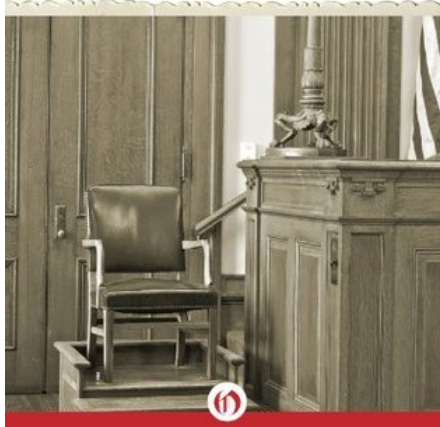


Rebecca West

A TRAIN OF POWDER



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A Train of Powder Rebecca West

Sent to cover the war crimes trials at Nuremberg for the New Yorker, Rebecca West brought along her inimitable skills for understanding a place and its people. In these accomplished articles, West captures the world that sprung up to process the Nazi leaders; from the city's war-torn structures to the courtroom security measures, no detail is left out. West's unparalleled grasp on human motivations and character offers particular insight into the judges, prosecutors, and of course the defendants themselves. This remarkable narrative captures the social and political ramifications of a world recovering from the divisions of war.

A Train of Powder Details

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From Reader Review A Train of Powder for online ebook

Jessica says

I bought this book for the trilogy of essays in it about the Nuremberg Trials and post-war Germany ("Greenhouse with Cyclamens" parts I, II and III). The first of these essays in particular, written in 1946, is utterly engrossing and quite devastating. West is unsparing and sometimes downright cruel in her characterization of others, and her acid commentary is perfectly suited to describing the defendants in the Nuremberg Trial (and the unrepentant German civilians who were never put on trial). I felt as though I were sitting in the courtroom with her, shuddering at the horrors and laughing at the absurdities. It's a really remarkable piece of writing.

The other essays in the book, while impressive in their own right, didn't live up to the immersiveness of the first one, but that may just be because the Nuremberg Trials were my main interest here. In any case, "Greenhouse with Cyclamens I" was worth of the price of the book for me.

Peter Smith says

"There is an old story which describes a native of Cincinnati, returned from a trip to Europe, telling a fellow townsman of an encounter with a beautiful girl which which had brightened a night he had spent in Paris. On and on the story goes, dwelling on the plush glories of the restaurant, the loveliness of the girl and her jewels and her dress, the magic of a drive in the Bois de Boulogne, the discrete luxury of the house to which she took him, till it rises to a climax in a bedroom carpeted with bearskins and lined with mirrors. 'And then?' 'Well – then it was very much like what it is in Cincinnati.' To many, love in Nuremberg was just as they had known it in Cincinnati, but for others the life of the heart was lived, in this desolate place given over to ruin and retributive law, with a special poignancy."

Nooilforpacifists says

Writing style is the protagonist in this collection of essays. Ms West's elliptical approach to English requires acclimation--I found myself reading sentences two or three times simple to parse them. Yet that strain eased within 50 pages.

Rebecca West was a criminal voyeur: the stories here are accounts of various trials from Nuremberg to Greenville, South Carolina. The German sequences are about half the book: most from the War Crimes trial, to a (non-trial) account of the Berlin Airlift; these were serialized in The New Yorker--and it shows: she constantly addresses the attitudes of GIs to Germans and visa-versa:

"The situation would have been more tolerable if these conquerors had taken the slightest interest in their conquest; but they did not. They were even embarrassed by it. 'Pardon my mailed glove,' they seemed to murmur as they drove in the American automobiles, which were all the Nuremberg roads then carried save the few run by the British and French. [Unlike British Officers, who tended to be professionals, here] were men who were wearing the laurels of the fastest and most improbable military victory in history, and all they

wanted to do was to be back doing well where they came from.... Lines on a young soldier's brow proclaimed that he did not care what decoration he won in the Ardennes; he wanted to go home and pretend Pearl Harbor had never been troubled and get in line for the partnership which should be open for the right man in a couple of years' time."

Of course, it's easy to read this as back-handed contempt, or (at least) confusion. And, at first glance, one could say the same of West's account of a lynching trial in Greenville, South Carolina--an event she compares to an opera. West doesn't doubt the guilt of 30 of the 31 white men tried for dragging from jail a black man accused of murdering a white taxi driver and beating him savagely before shooting him to death. She's properly contemptuous that such events could occur. But -- as in all her trial narratives -- she's scrupulously fair. Two defense attorneys made outrageously prejudicial arguments, true; but the prosecution failed to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt: there were no eye-witnesses, and none of the multiple confessions obtained shortly after the murder were sworn under penalty of perjury--all were recanted.

There are other accounts of English trials--a headless and legless body dropped from an airplane and a British spy. In each case, West's observations about otherwise minor characters are the most interesting. The spy chapter didn't work for me at all--too much time spent speculating without evidence or purpose.

Still, the book is worth it for the German pieces alone. Once you get used to her style.

k says

love loved, except for the hints of racism in one of last essays, and the recurrent appearance of "feminine" and synonyms as a negative (homophobic) description of males. of its time and all.

what i loved was the precision of description, as though she saw and understood all, and among the quotes i noted here's one i've returned to several times in the month since i've read it: "It was one of the events which do not become an experience." cutting!

other favorite:

"If a man stranded on a desert island should become a saint under the coconut palm but is never rescued, it should not be pretended that what happened to him is of no importance; for if that be conceded, then nothing is important, since humanity is stranded on this desert world and will certainly never be rescued."

Tom Leland says

She's been called the greatest news reporter ever -- I see why. West saw every situation from the largest possible perspective, yet often broke them down to the most minute particles. At times it was too much for me -- either her Britishness, or my lack of historical knowledge, or maybe her tendency to write so expansively, but for the most part, especially her reporting on the Nuremberg trials, were absolutely fascinating.

Chequers says

Questo non e' un libro, ma una raccolta di tre articoli scritti dalla West per vari giornali, esattamente nel 1946, nel 1949 e nel 1954.

Chi voleva un resoconto del processo di Norimberga restera' sicuramente deluso, in quanto la West ha una scrittura molto anticonformista, quasi cinica, e piu' che riportare fatti nudi e crudi descrive quello che era il "feeling" del processo: gli Alleati annoiati, che non vedevano l'ora di tornare a casa, i Russi cattivissimi che non vogliono collaborare, e dall'altra parte gli imputati, che sapevano benissimo che alla fine ci sarebbe stata per loro una condanna a morte e cercavano ogni occasione ed ogni cavillo per allungare il brodo e rimandare le sentenze.

Una cosa che mi ha stupito negli altri due articoli (quello del '49 e quello del '54) e' il profondo rispetto, quasi ammirazione, per il popolo tedesco: sicuramente lo ha guadagnato riorganizzandosi prontamente, tanto da diventare di nuovo un colosso economico in Europa, ma non sono tanto sicura che sia stato una vittima di Hitler e non un avventato complice. Non scordiamoci che Hitler ando' al potere eletto democraticamente, non certo con un colpo di mano come e' stato per Mussolini.

Un ultimo appunto: ho trovato la traduzione di Masolino D'Amico purtroppo molto carente, sembra quasi una prima bozza di una traduzione quasi letterale su cui poi lavorare: peccato che nessuno ci abbia poi lavorato!

Thom says

Nowadays this would probably have been written by Jon Ronson, and would have been very funny but lacked the intellectual and emotional depth of West's writing - I wish there were more people writing like this now

Teresa Proença says

Em 1946 - contratada pelo *Daily Telegraph* - a escritora e jornalista política Rebecca West deslocou-se à Alemanha para assistir à fase final dos julgamentos de Nuremberga. Sobre eles escreve três ensaios sobre o ambiente que se vivia na sala do tribunal e na cidade onde, após treze meses de julgamentos, dominava o tédio. Todos ansiavam pelo fim desse aborrecimento, excepto os réus que desejavam que nunca acabasse. Dos vinte e um réus, doze foram condenados à morte por enforcamento; três foram absolvidos e os restantes condenados a prisão entre dez anos a perpétua.

Ler sobre o nazismo causa-me sempre angústia e horror. E espanto. A dada altura, Rebecca West refere Joseph Goebbels que, no dia a seguir à morte de Hitler, se suicida junto com a mulher depois de terem matado os filhos; seis crianças entre os treze e os cinco anos.

Moirá Russell says

Justly famous for the long (long, long) Nuremberg *New Yorker* articles, but my favourites were actually the

shorter ones about the flashy gangster's murder and the would-be Russian spy, which is like a Smiley novel in miniature.

(Reading old, lengthy New Yorker articles on the Paperwhite is sort of nightmarish -- there's no sense of pagination or even paragraphing whatsoever, it just goes on and on and on, and no way to check to see how much of the chapter's left, either.)

Orsodimondo says

PONTE AEREO

Berlino: sposi divisi dal Muro. Il 30 settembre 1949 fu interrotto il ponte aereo verso Berlino Ovest.

Un reportage importante, ben oltre la dimensione giornalistica (tradotto da Masolino D'Amico).

I tre soggiorni di Rebecca West (pseudonimo di Cicely Isabel Fairfield) in terra di Germania dopo la fine della seconda guerra mondiale:

nel 1946 a Norimberga per seguire le fasi finali del celebre processo;

nel 1949 a Berlino per capire come se la cava l'ex capitale divisa tra le quattro potenze vincitrici, a loro volta divise in due blocchi contrapposti;

infine nel 1954 a seguire il progresso della possente macchina della ricostruzione tedesca.

Dieci milioni di esuli a spasso in terra di Germania, pesanti costrizioni imposte dai Paesi vincitori, i conflitti fra gli stessi 'Alleati', una nazione distrutta oltre l'immaginabile...

Dresda dopo il bombardamento alleato (Royal Air Force britannica e dalla United States Army Air Force) avvenuto tra il 13 e il 15 febbraio 1945: il 13 febbraio 1945 più di 800 aerei inglesi volarono su Dresda, scaricando circa 1.500 tonnellate di bombe esplosive e 1.200 tonnellate di bombe incendiarie. Il giorno dopo la città fu attaccata dai B-17 americani che in quattro raid la colpirono con altre 1.250 tonnellate di bombe. Nella mattinata del 15 febbraio ci fu l'ultima incursione di 200 bombardieri statunitensi sulla città ancora in fiamme. I bombardieri alleati rasero al suolo una gran parte del centro storico di Dresda con un bombardamento a tappeto, causando una strage di civili, con obiettivi militari solo indiretti. È ricordato come uno degli eventi più tragici del conflitto.

L'occhio di Rebecca West coglie tutto, niente tralascia, scrive come se fosse un romanzo, con prosa ricca ma secca, tagliente e sarcastica.

E individua l'immagine che riassume la situazione generale: una villa poco fuori Norimberga appartenuta a un ricco fabbricante di matite, espropriata dalle forze alleate, ospitava i tanti giornalisti corrispondenti arrivati per il processo – un anziano reduce di guerra con una gamba sola, aiutato da una bambina di dodici anni, con organizzazione passione e lavoro assiduo coltiva piantine, tra cui i ciclamini del titolo, i cui fiori sono spesso paragonati a delle farfalle visto che i loro petali sono come le loro ali.

Piante che crescono in mezzo a ruderi e rovine a rappresentare la rinascita tedesca, l'inizio di una nuova vita.

Non voleva fuggire dalla sua serra, voleva fuggire dentro di essa... voleva evadere nel suo lavoro manuale perché lui e quelli come lui avevano dimostrato un'eccezionale incapacità di rendere gradevole il resto dell'esistenza. Era fuggito in un'altra dimensione, in cui il dolore non aveva potere su di lui. Era fuggito nel suo lavoro.

Il processo di Norimberga iniziò il 20 novembre 1945 e si concluse il 1 ottobre 1946. Furono in realtà due distinti processi: il primo e più famoso fu ai principali criminali di guerra davanti al Tribunale militare internazionale (IMT), che giudicò ventiquattro dei più importanti capi nazisti catturati o ancora ritenuti in vita. Il secondo fu per criminali di guerra inferiori, tenuto sotto la Legge numero 10 del Consiglio di Controllo dal Tribunale militare di Norimberga (NMT), e comprese anche il famoso processo ai dottori. Il primo processo si concluse con 12 condanne a morte, 3 assoluzioni, l'industriale Krupp non venne processato per motivi di salute, 3 ergastoli, tre sentenze di carcere con pene di 10, 15 e 20 anni. Un imputato si suicidò in carcere.

Gyoza says

A group I belong to was doing a challenge throughout the month of October to read books by or about people or places in Ireland. Since Rebecca West, the journalist, travel writer, and novelist was part Irish and she was born in Kerry, this was one of the books I read for it. As is probably obvious from the cover art, *A Train of Powder* is a collection of six articles she wrote while covering various criminal trials. They read more like short stories than like magazine articles because the author really develops the characters, their background, the circumstances of the crimes, and also her own thoughts on the situations.

Three of the articles make up a series called *Greenhouse with Cyclamens*, where she relates her thoughts during the closing sessions of the Nuremberg Trials and the rebuilding of Germany, including her observations of the personalities of top Nazi leaders like Goering and Hess as they sat in the dock, differences between German and American/British law, growing tensions between the Soviet Union and the other three Allies who shared control of Germany, leading up to the Soviets' attempt to isolate Berlin from the West and the resulting Berlin Airlift, and the nascent West German government's insistence on a free market economy despite pressure from the occupying Allies to adopt a more statist model.

Opera in Greenville is about a lynching in Greenville, South Carolina in 1947. A mob of about 30 people, mostly cabdrivers, convinced the prison warden to hand over a young black man named Willie Earle, in jail on suspicion of having killed the disabled white cabdriver who was driving him home. After some days of no results from the local police, the FBI was called in to find the perpetrators. West does a good job of sketching out what life was like in 1940's Greenville and situating the crime in a society undergoing a transition in its attitudes towards race relations and vigilante justice.

Mr. Setty and Mr. Hume is about a 1949 London murder case. A man who enjoys hunting on weekends goes out in his boat to the marshlands at the mouth of the Thames hoping to bag some duck. Instead, he comes across a bag full of a more grisly type of meat. The remains turn out to be those of Mr. Setty, a shady businessman and member of a well-to-do immigrant family. Mr. Hume is the ex-R.A.F. pilot with a checkered past charged with the murder and disposal of the body.

A Better Mousetrap is the story of an espionage case involving a young British radio telegraph operator employed at the Diplomatic Wireless Service suspected of passing information to a high official in the Soviet

embassy.

Manik Sukoco says

If you're looking for a book dealing solely with the subject of the post-World War II Nuremberg trials, this one won't satisfy your thirst, despite the product description.

However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't give West's book your attention. The book is actually a series of short stories, all dealing with trials occurring in the aftermath of World War II. She begins with an account of Nuremberg, and the details West is known for shine through in her descriptions of the accused, of the town, of the supporting characters all shine. But she also delves deeper, giving insight into what she feels is the true goal of international law.

Some of the other stories are even stronger. West describes the trial of a man accused of murder, who allegedly threw the pieces of the body into the sea. Again, the details are poignant: she presents both sides of the story, describes the marsh and the family of the man who found the body, the wife of the accused. These are small pieces, often left unnoticed in accounts that chillingly recite facts.

Over and over, West contemplates the guilt of the accused, and often the reasons behind bringing him to stand trial. Her observations are nuanced, and rather than a simple rendering of both sides of the story, you can almost imagine that she's having an inner dialog with herself.

Kirsten says

This was a Kindle Daily Deal on Amazon, and advertised as being solely about the Nurnberg trials, which is why I bought it. But the stories about other criminal trials were just as compelling -- in fact, I liked them better than the second and third parts on Nurnberg. Although Rebecca West tends to wander off on tangents, her writing is always evocative, and it's more like listening to a fascinating storyteller than reading a book and wondering when the writer will come to the point.

Calzean says

Rebecca West has an eye for detail, an astute judgement of character, an ability to see the obvious when it is clouded by detail, propaganda or misreporting and a use of language that is up there with the best. Her book covers the end of the Nuremberg trials, a look at post war Germany, an unfortunate English spy and a racist trial in South Georgia. All interesting stories, all uniquely told.

False says

I've been meaning to read more of Rebecca West for decades. I'm only now getting around to it. I re-read a contemporary biography and just finished her selected letters. This was a book of essays, mainly written post WWII about her time in Germany and the Nuremburg trials, the chief essay, in three parts, called "Greenhouse with Cyclamens." While on the outskirts of Nuremburg for the Nazi trials she found a

greenhouse managed by an old man with one leg and a 12-year old girl. All they grew were cyclamens, enormous, and West was fascinated they had a thriving business when people couldn't even afford food and clothing. There's something to be said for a spot of beauty in a period of ugliness. You need to breathe normally. What she did not reveal was that she was having an affair with one of the married judges from America. Her affair was as broken up into parts as this one essay. He was weak. Wouldn't leave his wife for her. Later, when he tried again, she told him to never speak to her again.
