

## **I. Sense of Loss, Nostalgia and Irony in *The Return of the Soldier***

Rebecca West is a well-known woman novelist of early twentieth century period. In her early works, she portrays the contemporary social, political and economic conditions, which are affected by the Great War. In the awareness of the conditions of modernity and rural life and the consequences of family structure and individual characters, West plays vital role in modern literary field. Most of West's early novels are based on the social, political and domestic backgrounds in which she raises the issue of gender, class, politics and others against the background of the World War I.

*The Return of the Soldier*, Rebecca West's first novel, published in 1918, just after the World War I, depicts British social life affected by the World War I. It focuses on the complex and unusual aspects of socio-cultural conditions as it does in the family life as well as the individual life. It is probably least romantic, ironical and most pragmatic of West's novels. *The Return of the Soldier* is West's highly stressful novel in its dominant emotional atmosphere, which brings certain rendering pictures as the evidence of rock-like society and also the true and hopeless illusiveness of the world. It is a canon of great literary masterpieces, which concerns with the reversal of great authority of contradictory patriarchal ideology and picturing of war menaces in a crystal clear vision. *The Return of the Soldier* is one of the best examples of modernist literary text especially focusing on the issues of sense of loss, nostalgia and irony in its various levels. It dramatizes and threats upon the dominant existing ideologies like hegemonic patriarchy, conventional notion of thought, so-called sophisticated and highly fashionable life. Most importantly, it ironizes the war through family and the individual lives representing them as devastated and psychologically disordered. West is attacking on asocial and immoral structure of the time and the consequences of war through this novel. Such unusual aspects create instability through characters'

different activities like sophisticated manner and hypocritical behavior of Kitty Baldry and Jenny and the stereotypical attitude towards Margaret Allington. The depiction of the mental trauma of war through Chris Baldry, who returns home to Baldry Court from the War Front as a victim of shell, unable to recall the past fifteen years of his life, shows his as well as West's nostalgia for the pre-war life and family.

Rebecca West uses irony to present sense of loss and nostalgia. To depict the instability, complexity, ambiguity, virtues and vices and the contemporary British family and also to resist the unusual aspects of war in the British society, she presents war and its consequences in ironic way. In surface level *The Return of the Soldier* does not seem to have the presence of sense of loss, nostalgia and irony but in deeper level this novel is not untouched by these modernist issues. This novel depicts irony in various ways like that of stable irony, political irony and it also has the irony in its narration. Irony functions here as a discursive strategy which adds the said and unsaid meaning of certain context. The intended irony of the author to ironize the war and its consequences equally matches with the readers' intention. One of the famous critics, Marina Mackay, in this regard talks in her *The Lunacy of Men, Idiocy of Women: Woolf, West and War*:

A comparable effect is attained by the partial, if not obviously unreliable, narration of West's novel. The devastating epiphany for Kitty and Jenny is that Chris's fugue "shows there are bits of him we don't know" (39). Yet they are able to deny his interiority by making him simply "a soldier" once again, enacting in the plot (the "return") and the narration (his experience is never told from his own point of view) Chris's entrapment in the conventional masculine role. The political irony of this strategy is emphasized in both novels by the male

characters' fruitless attempts to objectify their female lovers [. . .].

(133)

West's use of irony shows the failure of so-called traditional and conservative ideology which in fact is the moral failure of patriarchy. Her ironizing of war exposes war and its consequences as condemnable ones. The connection of the war front and the home front in *The Return of the Soldier* also shows that World War I not only changes the soldiers who go to the war front – their psyche, taste and their sense of reality- but also the women who indirectly participate in it. Chris's recovery process parallels with Jenny's transformation process. As Chris psychologically returns to the reality of 1916, Jenny is able to better locate herself the patriarchal class structure that is undergoing changes due to the impact of World War I. The idea of woman as an artifact recurs when Jenny contrasts old-fashioned Margaret with Kitty's beautiful objet a "white nymph in a black bowl". It is an ironic representation but irony subverts such conservative ideology.

All through this short novel, Jenny's narration builds up a mood of loss, missed opportunities and nostalgia. Both nostalgia and irony come together as said by Linda Hutcheon in her article *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern*: "What irony and nostalgia share, therefore, is a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or emotion and politics." (42). Both the issues share the same ideas of effects of war and class discrimination. Her initial account of their perfect pre-war life begins to break apart, and what surfaces in its stead is a world of suppressed feelings and unacknowledged problems hiding behind the seemingly perfect Baldry Court life. *The Return of the Soldier* is a mediation on the then unacknowledged psychological effects of the great war on memory and identity; on social class and on the concepts of sanity, adulthood, responsibility and truth. In this regard, Karl Rollinson argues:

*The Return of the Soldier* is inspired by a medical journal article that describes the case of an older factory employee who fell down a staircase on his head and revived thinking he was a twenty-year-old. Due to the loss of memory, he rejected his wife and sought out a woman he was in love with when he was twenty. (69)

In order to present the destructions of World War I on public and domestic order and the consequent transformation of women's roles, West borrows the plot places it in the background of World War I Britain.

In West's implication of irony, she has made a connection with sense of loss and nostalgia in such a way that all these issues seem to be interconnected. Not only the characters in the novel but also West herself seems to be nostalgic to the pre-war British society. The pre-war idyll that Chris takes refuge in represents a past world though that cannot outlast the terrible consequences of the war. So, Chris seems, here, nostalgic to the pre-war life. Not only this, as Chris is in the hospital, he writes a letter to his former beloved Margaret Allington in spite of his wife Kitty Baldry. In his amnesiac condition, he does not have the memory of past fifteen years along with the year he spent in war. He only remembers those days, which he spent happily with his love on Monkey Island. Jenny and Kitty's nostalgia turns out to be ironic when their impassionate awaiting of Chris goes in vain as he forgets Kitty as his wife. Margaret, his only solace both as a mother figure and a lover can "cure" Chris by reminding him of his dead son. Nostalgia, in this context, functions as a medicine to cure Chris as Linda Hutcheon further argues:

Nostalgia, however, does not simply repeat or duplicate memory. Susan Stewart's provocative study, *On Longing* suggestively calls nostalgia a "social disease," defining it as "the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition. The argument is that, denying or at least

degrading the present as it is lived, nostalgia makes the idealized (and therefore always absent) past into the site of immediacy, presence and authenticity. (34-35)

In this context, Chris is “unmanned” or given the qualities like “unmasculine” and vulnerability and a woman is displayed with strength and protectiveness. So, here, Margaret is associated with nature, nurture and primitive strength and Chris’s “unmasculine” and vulnerable qualities represent the unsettled nature of society during and after the Great Wars. Not only is this, rather, Margaret so intent in curing Chris that she even becomes ready to sacrifice her happiness to cure Chris. In this connection, Kristen Renzi in an article “*Prophetic Madness, or Being “Madly” Human: A Reading of Social Dimensions of Cure and Sanity in Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier* (1918) writes:

What might be simple nostalgia on Margaret’s part for a romance that ended in her youth is, for Chris, depicted as a state of madness strangely akin to youth, in which he is allowed as Susan Varney writes, to “return [. . .] to a time of innocence...before any disappointments in love. (261-63)

Nostalgia is used to show both great and small effects in *The Return of the Soldier*. The characters’ nostalgia and attitudes are complex and ambiguous. These nostalgia and attitudes are the true representation of the post-war British society. West sets her nostalgic events for domestic to broad political activities, which become sufficient in ironizing the consequences of war. How nostalgia is interconnected can best be justified through the single word from novel’s title “return”. The word “return” signifies different kinds of returns in the novel like that of physical return of Chris to his home, psychological or nostalgic return of Chris to fifteen years back- 1901 being amnesiac and the return to the war front when his amnesia is cured. Hence, the return

of the soldiers those most British women are waiting for ironically turns out to be their ultimate return to the war front. So much so, all the characters in the novel are nostalgic. Chris is nostalgic as he is shown intact to his room as well as his recognition of his son's jersey and ball in his amnesiac condition. Kitty and Jenny are nostalgic to the pre-war life when they were together with Chris; Jenny remembers her childhood memory playing with Chris and Margaret's nostalgia is for her intense longing for the love of Chris. James Harper Strom in his thesis "Modernist Aesthetics of "Home" in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*" argues:

The unstable mental address to which Chris assigns his notion of home becomes the world in which Jenny and Kitty find themselves. They exist in a state of strained nostalgia, pining halfheartedly for a life that existed either in the far-removed past or not at all. Even before Chris's return, Jenny finds herself regressing into a childhood where her cousin Chris was her playmate and confidant and where her infatuation with him could be considered innocent and entirely platonic. (38)

Irony happens in discourse, its semantic and syntactic dimensions cannot be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its contexts of deployment and attributions. *The Return of the Soldier* is enormously complicated though short novel, even by the standards of Rebecca West who creates characters and situations of unusual complexity. The memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable and so obedient at others, so bewildered and so weak and so tyrannical and beyond control. West's use of irony is indirectly the signal of revolution of the contemporary base. Her irony concerns with the female experiences and feelings.

Irony has the larger sense of certain background. It focuses on the misplaced and misguided practices. The ironists have the intention to avoid such practices and

create comfortable environment. Rebecca West also wants to create a peaceful environment avoiding such unusual practices. Her ironical strategy is somehow distinct from others in the sense that she intentionally expresses her ironic attitude towards the loss of familial happiness, social harmony and gender and class discrimination because of the World War I. She ironizes the so-called masculinity by giving feminine attribute to the male character and masculine responsibility to the female characters. In her use of irony, nostalgia also becomes the victim of irony. In this response, Ann V. Norton in *Paradoxical Feminism, The Novels of Rebecca West* remarks: “As a feminist...she blamed men and the patriarchal structure of society- or fathers- for human unhappiness. As a Freudian...West looked to mothers and fathers as the key to human soul”(80).

Rebecca West questions the contemporary unusual norms and values through *The Return of the Soldier*. She upside downs such established traditional and conservative structures. Her advocacy of liberal and revolutionary mind questions the rigidness of ideologies of socio-political phenomena. Her ironical appraisal challenges the groundless existence of rigid patriarchal ideology. In this regard, talking about the approach of Rebecca West, Peggy D. Pence, in her thesis *Irreconcilable Differences in the Early Works of Rebecca West*, quotes: “West has not explored the political and economic revolution and celebrated the release of female desire and powers which the revolution made possible” (36). Pence, here tries to demonstrate the subversive political ideology of West.

*The Return of the Soldier* is not only of the story of a soldier whose return is awaited but it is also a story which questions upon the established so many so-called civilized norms and values of the post-war period as represented by Kitty and Jenny’s perspective towards Margaret. It uses irony to question those so-called civilized norms and values as well as the virtues and vices of that period as we can see the

virtuous feeling of Margaret towards Chris in particular and to the Baldry Court family in general when she says: “Take him something the boy wore, some toy he played with” (166), to cure Chris of his amnesia. And, the vicious attitude of Kitty towards Margaret can be understood when Kitty says:

You are impertinent. I know exactly what you are doing. You have read in the “Harrow Observer” or somewhere that my husband is at the front, and you come to tell this story because you think that you will get some money. I have read of such cases in the papers. You forget that if anything had happened to my husband the War Office would have told me. You should think yourself very lucky that I don’t hand you over to the police. (25-26)

The above-stated remark is made when Margaret has been to Baldry Court to tell the true story about Chris’s illness, but Kitty takes it negatively. Kitty’s vicious attitude can also be seen most in the beginning parts of the novel as she treats Margaret as a lower class woman. Most importantly, the novel comes vehemently upon war menaces. Thus, to explicate the meaning and effects of war like that of Chris’s amnesia and his fragmented family, West uses irony. Wyatt Bonikowski, in this regard asserts: “In West’s novel the soldier brings home a revelation about the war and the effects of war on the domestic scene, but the experience of war in general and Baldry’s experience of his own trauma is absent from the novel. Chris’s trauma has no origin and content” (514).

Rebecca West’s use of irony is an opposition in social conventions and individual passion to transform the literary stereotypes on moral sophistication in which characters represent antithetical temperaments as we see male character Chris with feminine attributes, female characters with the vigor and responsibility of male; the upper class Kitty and Jenny’s fall to the lower status because of their ill-treatment

to Margaret and the rise of Margaret's status to the higher position when she behaves as a mother figure to treat Chris. The story contains much social satire, targeted particularly at two characters Kitty Baldry and Jenny where, in the hospital Chris sent a letter to Monkey Island, Margaret's old address, which is the current address in his mind to inform her that he was injured and hospitalized. When Margaret received the letter, she went to Chris's house- Baldry Court- and passed the news to Chris's cousin Jenny and his wife Kity. But, Kitty accused Margaret lying for money as both she and Jenny believed the war office would wire them if Chris was really injured. So, irony lies in their conception about Margaret.

In *The Return of the Soldier* West implicitly affirms the brutality of war and its irreparable evil. The polysemous "return" provokes the re-return of soldiers in war front and connotes the prolonging of threat of war in human life. So, by presenting the reversed human qualities where a male character is "unmanned" and vulnerable by the effect of war and the female characters powered by masculine qualities, West ironizes the war and its consequences in everyway.

Since this thesis explores modernist issues like sense of loss, nostalgia and irony in *The Return of the Soldier*, it will be necessary to discuss the theoretical modality briefly. The basic theoretical modality of this dissertation is irony and the connection of nostalgia with it. While analyzing irony as theoretical modality of this dissertation, *The Return of the Soldier* is found to be embodying various types of irony like politics of irony, stable irony and ironies of war as Paul Fussell states in his *The Great War and Modern Memory* which is reviewed by Robert Darby. Firstly, to focus on the politics of irony, it is embedded with the birth of discourse. Discourse analysis is an ironic analysis, which in cultural studies, concern the matter of representation. In the consequences of interpreting the texts it is essential to know the scene of irony which appears its recognition, its situation, its distinction from other

rhetorical tropes and transideological politics of irony. In the study of the discursive politics of irony, we might well expect to find a concentration of examples of irony focused on issues of gender, race, class or sexuality.

Irony sets up in the relationship between ironist and audiences. Such relationship between ironist and audiences may be political one. It relates with the socio-political context. It depicts the hierarchical notion within different discourses. Irony has discursive power, sometimes it emerges laughter and sometimes it creates so many serious conditions. Linda Hutcheon in her *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* says:

Irony has the most subversive power. Because of this subversive power, it has become the most appropriate mode not only for politically suppressed groups, but more generally for those with the divided allegiance that comes from the dominant norms of race, ethnicity, gender or sexual choice. (31)

The political use of irony is to advocate all of the marginalized as well as centralized aspects. Irony can function as a deconstructive tool which brings the consciousness of marginal groups into the centre and subverts the boundary between centre and margin that is “revolutionary or deconstructive irony” in Hutcheon’s words (41). That is why, feminist writers use irony as a deconstructive strategy to subvert the so-called hegemonic patriarchal ideology. Irony in its political nature avoids the ambiguities and decentres the patriarchal discourses. West’s ironic voice is the voice of the marginalized woman in the post-war England.

Apart from political use of irony in Rebecca West’s novel, the stable irony can be explored. In stable irony, there is a constant perspective from which to perceive the underlying meaning, it means when the ironic intention of the speaker is shared with the reader by means of some patent clues offered in the text by the author, it is called

stable irony. Even though such deep or underlying meaning in stable irony remains hidden, it is intended to be discovered by the proper reader. In his book *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1975) Wayne C. Booth suggests for basic characteristics through which stable irony can be understood. As he states; it is 'intended', 'covert', 'fixed', and 'finite' in application (6). In stable irony there must be a kind of harmony between the belief that the author holds and the reader honestly sees it. In another words, unlike the original proposition, even the reconstructed meaning must be in harmony with unspoken beliefs that the reader has decided to attribute to the particular text. In that sense, stable irony is fixed or one where we are bound to the author's belief as written by Claire Colebrook in his article *The Philosophy of Irony*:

Irony is part of a more general process of understanding and recognition, where we discern intentions and meanings through the assumption of common conventions and projects and an overall ideal of coherence. The ironies within a literary text are signaled either by plot or by disjunctions of character and context. (44-45)

Regarding such literary fixity produced by the author, Booth says; "the author's own beliefs that entwines the interpretations of stable ironies so inescapably in intentions" 11.

West's intended ironic voice is the voice of marginalized women in the post-war modern society of England as well as her ironic voice is mainly intended towards ironizing the consequences of war. While talking about West's intention of ironizing the war, there are various consequences in the novel that are the aftermath effects of war. Robert Darby, in his article *Oscillations on the Hotspur- Falstaff Spectrum: Paul Fussell and the Ironies of War* reviews Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* where Darby finds Fussell's focus on the issues of 'high diction' in poetry and rhetoric, the dynamics of consolation and the uses of irony. Darby writes: "He

writes in the preface that the *Great War and Modern Memory* is about ‘the British experience on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918’ and some of the literary means by which it has been remembered, conventionalized and mythologized”(308). Robert Darby further writes that “*The Great War and Modern Memory* includes several suggestive discussions of the long term effects of the war on English society and cultural practices generally and literary texts specifically” (309). Hence, West’s ironizing of war can be analyzed in relevance with Paul Fussell’s concept as reviewed by Robert Darby: “Fussell is arguing that, as a result of the war, all our perceptions become ironic [ . . . ]” (313).

In this respect, Rebecca West’s ironic voice is the voice against the war, intended towards ironizing the consequences of war and it is the voice to avoid ideological contradictions. This dissertation explores how Rebecca West looks at the post-war British society from the perspective of human values and the concerns of the declining patriarchal family when it suffers from the impact of World War I.

## **II. War and Politics of Irony in *The Return of the Soldier***

This research focuses upon how Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* ironizes the sense of loss, nostalgia and the effect of the war. It also unravels how West has used the subversive political irony to depict the complex ideological contradiction, domination and its resistance. West's use of stable irony is intended towards ironizing the sense of loss and nostalgia that are the consequences of the war. The study argues that irony happens as a part of communicative process. It is not a static rhetorical tool to be used, but it itself comes into being in the relations and interpretations. Unlike other rhetorical tropes, it provides the possible consequences of the complex examples from the daily lives of the characters and their communications.

Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* is replete with numerous cases of various types of ironies like political irony, stable irony and ironies of war with the irony of sense of loss and nostalgia. The expression of the first person participant narrator reveals the sense of loss and nostalgia turning into ironic situations which are encountered by almost all the characters like Kitty, Margaret and Chris along with Jenny herself. In the novel, Chris Baldry, a soldier, who as a result of shell-shock, develops amnesia and therefore forgets the last fifteen years of his life. Chris returns to his wealthy and beautiful estate to recover, and is looked after by three women: Kitty, his wife whom he does not remember; Jenny, his cousin, whom he has known all his life and Margaret, a woman he has loved in his youth. His love with Margaret breaks apart because of his misunderstanding and marries with Kitty. His misunderstanding arises when he sees Margaret with Bert Batchard in the island which makes him think that she is 'larking' with Bert by deceiving him. But, ironically, the task of bringing Chris back to the real world falls onto Margaret and it is she who will put an end to this idyll and make him remember the harsh reality of

the wartime. At the end, she goes back to her obscure marriage and he returns to the war.

Irony has become a pervasive discursive strategy for the study of culture and other cultural activities. It has sparked debates whether it should be lauded as a vehicle for political or social commentary and whether its political or social function is essentially conservative or subversive. Irony can be provocative when its politics is conservative or authoritarian as easily as oppositional and subversive but it depends on who is using it and seen to be such as the transideological politics of irony.

Likewise, the ironic writer in stable irony provides a kind of 'literary fixity' of which we can have unequivocal, absolute and fixed ironic interpretations. The stable irony, in this sense, covers all intentional, verbal, dramatic ironies which say one thing and give to understand the opposite. For instance, 'Dramatic irony' as said by M. H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

Dramatic irony involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances, or expects the opposite of what we know that fate holds in store, or says something that anticipates the actual outcome, but not at all in the way that the character intends. (137)

Thus, the audience is able to see a discrepancy between characters' perceptions and the reality they face. Characters' beliefs and actions become ironic within the dramatic situation because they are very different or opposite from the reality of the action like Kitty's perception about Margaret as quite opposite to what Margaret actually is. Margaret is as truthful as Kitty thinks her to be deceitful.

Similarly, 'Verbal irony' occurs when the words of a character or narrator have an implicit meaning as well as an apparent one. The surface meaning may be false or it may be a level of meaning that it is just very different from the underlying one as written by M. H. Abrams "Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed" (135). For example, in *The Return of the Soldier*, Margaret, who has been inferiorized by Kitty for her poverty, but later in the progress of story, she comes to be a mother figure to cure Chris and comes to be a vital character. At that very moment, when she becomes the important person to cure Chris, she comments on Kitty saying, "I know I shouldn't make personal remarks, but Mrs. Baldry is lovely. She has three circles round her neck. I've only two"(153). Here, it is clear that Margaret's intention is not to praise Kitty positively but to ironize her stupidity which she had done at the beginning of the novel when Margaret was at the Baldry Court to give the information about Chris's illness. So, from this perspective of stable irony, West becomes successful in ironizing the sense of loss and nostalgia that the characters face and she equally ironizes the consequences of war when there is the reverse situation than the characters expose.

Since, this is the focus of entire study, that gives some examples and overview of the different ways in which irony can be considered transideological in its politics and irony can be hidden or covert in its meaning. For this reason, her ironical strategy is similar to the idea said by Claire Colebrook in his article: "Today, when writers defend the stability of irony, they do so because they assume that politics is primarily directed towards consensus, communication and the minimization of ambiguity and conflict. They also assume that there are norms and truths outside political performance or rhetoric" (44).

The narrator of the novel is Jenny, a female character and the main character or the character upon whom the whole story revolves around is Chris, who is given a feminine role as well as a shell-shocked figure. Kitty, his wife and Jenny, his cousin, are waiting for the returning of the soldier. Before the arrival of Chris to the Baldry Court, his amnesiac condition is revealed by Margaret Allington, his former beloved, with whom he was in love before fifteen years. Chris sends a letter to Margaret revealing his weak health condition because he thinks that he is still in love with her. The letter is delivered to Baldry Court to inform to Kitty and Jenny. However, Kitty and Jenny have the thinking about Margaret's work something other than she actually does. They think the letter is only a fraud and Margaret wants to cheat them. We know this when Jenny says: "I hoped that Kitty would let her go without scaring her too much with words and would not mind if I gave her a little money" (24). Their ironic conception is turned into reality when Frank Baldry, Chris's cousin's letter to Jenny is revealed which is sent to her by revealing Chris's amnesiac condition: "I WAS sorry the next morning that the post comes too late at Harrowweald to be brought up with the morning tea and waits for one at the breakfast table; for under Kitty's fixed gaze I had to open a letter which bore the Boulogne postmark and addressed in the writing of Frank Baldry, Chris's cousin, who is in the church" (34).

The character of Chris Baldry and the three female characters Kitty, Jenny and Margaret in Rebecca West's *The Return of the soldier* and their study is the prime focus of this research. The characters' study sets an example for the real cases of men whose warfare intervention resulted in cases of mental breakdown and the vigor and endeavor of the female characters rehabilitate him from his mental breakdown which is the instance of ironic reversal of the gender role of the British society. After Chris's return from the war suffering from amnesia, as a result of shell-shock, his behavior and posture revealed the opposite of the masculine hegemony. Unexpectedly, Chris's

character acquires a feeling of sensibility, a sense of nostalgia, a particular emotional state together with a certain passivity and drowsiness that dragged him closer to the feminine model of Baldry Court than to the masculine world of warfront. Until he remains in warfare, nostalgia haunts both Kitty and Jenny too but that breaks apart as soon as his arrival.

Only Margaret remains intensely in his memory as the charming young woman as he knew as opposed to ‘the middle-aged, married, and scarred by poverty’ and hard-working woman she is now. But, Chris remembers her as if he and she are in the age of 1901. And it is Margaret, Chris wishes to see and be with when he is brought home, much to the fright and incredulity of both his forgotten wife and his incredulous cousin respectively. The war presents constantly throughout the writing of the book. As displayed in her work, Rebecca West’s stance regarding World War I and its aftermath is a conflicting one: she abhorred violence and bloodshed, but tremendously admired those who faced the horrors bravely in reversing the gender and class role.

The beginning of the novel occupies much space with the conversation between Kitty and Jenny. In their conversation Kitty exposes in her view and those of her day a male body as an object and a site of power defined in terms of vitality, competitiveness, strength and assertiveness and the battlefield as basically the another site for building manly characters. But, ironically, neither Chris, a male body turns out to be power nor battlefield is a site for building manly characters as seen to the condition of Chris. This stance explains when Kitty reassures regarding Chris’s well-being; in fact in her expression that a true man’s place is “where the fighting is really hot”, only there could men prove their manhood and therefore justify a cause for concern, “If a woman began to worry in these days because her husband hadn’t written to her for a fortnight-! Besides, if he had been anywhere where the fighting is

really hot, he'd have found some way of telling me instead of just leaving it as 'somewhere in France. He'll be all right' (3).

The sense of loss and the ironic consequence of war can be also seen in the "nursery" from where the story begins, "we were sitting in the nursery" (3) because in the next statement we learn that this is not the place of children and wife, it is rather a site of loss and death, "I had not meant to enter it again now that the child was dead" (3). It shows the barrenness of the trenches that has invaded the privacy of the home front. The misery and wretchedness of the war has spread everywhere and corrupted the splendor of the house- Baldry Court in the novel- rebuilt by Chris after his marriage, where West's intended irony to ironize the war matches with the sentiment of the readers as well as the nostalgia of the narrator:

The house lies on the crest of Harrowweald, and from its windows the eye droops to miles of emerald pastureland lying wet and brilliant under a westward line of sleek hills blue with distance and distant woods, while nearer it ranges the suave decorum of the lawn and the Lebanon cedar whose branches are like darkness made palpable, [. . .] that day its beauty was an affront to me, because like most Englishwomen of my time I was wishing for the return of a soldier. (6-7)

Jenny, the narrator, exposes her anxiety over Chris's safety and well-being, in which she is nostalgic too, as she expresses her wish to seize her cousin back from the danger of the outer world of the war and into the inner world of peace and security that both she and Kitty have created as Jenny remarks, "I wanted to snatch my cousin Christopher from the wars and seal him in the green pleasantness his wife and I now looked upon" (7). Ironically, Chris is 'snatched' not by her but by amnesia and returned to the "green pleasantness" of Baldry Court being amnesiac. Here, Chris

returns along with the older Chris aged by the trenches “his hair was of three colors now- brown and gold and silver,”(43) came a younger one, left in the year of 1901, which is his nostalgia for the pre-war life, a well-settled romantic life. Nostalgia has taken him back to his past fifteen years distancing from the present. This nostalgia gives him solace and he also wants to be there in the past life because of its beautiful, harmonious and happy life as said by Linda Hutcheon in her article:

Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near. This simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful or harmonious past is constructed (and then experienced emotionally) in conjunction with the present... which in turn, is constructed as complicated, contaminated, anarchic, difficult, ugly and confrontational. Nostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects, making the past feel complete, stable, coherent, safe from “the unexpected and the untoward, from accident and from betrayal”[. . .] in other words, making it so very unlike the present. (26-27)

The new Chris who has returned home unaware of his role as a soldier and a husband has gone back to an age of innocence. He believes himself to be still living in the romantic dream of Monkey Island where he first met Margaret, and enforces on seeing his old love much to the horror of his wife and the incredulity of his cousin.

Chris finds the present time and place unfamiliar to him. He feels that the women there are new to him as Jenny narrates: “Even to me he would give no trust, because it was Jenny the girl who had been his friend and not Jenny the woman. All the inhabitants at this new tract of time were his enemies, all its circumstances his prison-bars” (55). It shows Chris’s nostalgia for pre-war idyll and the effect of war as devastating but ironically his nostalgia cannot place him back to the pre-war idyllic life. When Margaret comes to see him, he sees the woman he loved when he was

twenty-one, “a girl in white who lifted a white face or drooped a dull gold head (70) not the “sallow [. . .] face” (24) Margaret now possesses.

Chris, though suffering from amnesia he can beautifully recall his past life with Margaret. As Jenny inquires him about his past life in Monkey Island, he tells her the whole story even if he has forgotten his wife Kitty. West is dexterous enough to present the pre-war world as more beautiful, harmonious and blissful than the reconstructed postwar world as she shows Chris being nostalgic to the past. The following point where Jenny narrates the nostalgic expression of Chris about his and Margaret’s life in Monkey Island, justifies the above-stated issue:

Then Chris would say he had to go, and they would stand in a communing silence while the hearty voice of Mr. Allington shouted from midstream or under the alder-boughs a disregarded invitation to stay and have a bite of supper. In the liquefaction of colors which happens on a summer evening, when the green grass seemed like a precious fluid poured out on the earth and dripping over to the river, and the chestnut candles were no longer proud flowers, but just wet, white lights in the humid mass of the tree, when the brown earth seemed just a little denser than the water, Margaret also participated. (69-70)

In her political use of irony, West presents amnesiac Chris to act like a child than in fact the young adult he believes he is. He is nostalgic and goes to recollect the events that are embedded in a far distant past: “to what ponies we had been strapped when at the age of five we were introduce to the hunting-field; how we had teased to be allowed to keep swans [. . .] and how the yellow bills of our intended pets had sent us shrieking homewards” (53). Here, Chris is presented as a submissive character rather

than a bold male what it is to be in a hegemonic masculinity, because of his amnesia and nostalgia for the irrecoverable past as said by Linda Hutcheon:

Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power [. . .] for both conservatives and ideals alike. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, as idealized through memory and desire. (25)

Moreover, there is evidence throughout the novel of Chris's peculiarities, namely his dependent character and sensitive personality as Jenny explains that 'he was not like other men'.

*The Return of the Soldier* is full of varieties of ironies and the study digs out some of them. It is difficult to find out the implication of ironic meaning in the novel since Rebecca West is trying to ironize not only the consequences of war but equally she tries to ironize the so-called sophisticated British society. So, it needs to look at the 'complex verbal relationships' of the novel because the ironic meaning comes from the verbal relationships itself as said by Paul A. Bove in his article *Cleanth Brooks and Modern Irony: A Kierkegaardian Critique*: "In ironic or contextualist poetry and criticism, meaning is not a result of statement, but of a complex of verbal relationships and qualifications, existing on the page. These linguistic patterns alone create and convey meaning appropriate to the complexity and order of the ironist's vision" (730). The communication between the characters like Kitty and Jenny is highly ironic.

The first concern of the study is to show the ideological confrontation from the perspective of irony, which is the transideological politics of irony. This politics of irony concerns with the main characters like Kitty, Jenny, Margaret and Chris. There

is difference between appearance and reality in their activities and perspectives. Kitty and Jenny think of one thing about Margaret's information about Chris's injury and the reality is different. They seem to see Margaret as disloyal and they think she is giving misinformation but in reality she is giving the right information and is caring about Chris:

She looked far away from us, to open the door and its view of dark pines and pale March sunshine, and appeared to swallow something. "Why, that he's hurt," she gently said. "Wounded, you mean?" asked Kitty. Her rusty plumes oscillated as she moved her mild face about with an air of perplexity. "Yes," she said, "he's wounded." Kitty's bright eyes met mine, and we obeyed that mysterious human impulse to smile triumphantly at the spectacle of a fellow-creature occupied in baseness. For this news was not true. It could not possibly be true. The War Office would have wired to us immediately if Chris had been wounded. (20)

Kitty Baldry's attitude to show Margaret as hypocrite and herself a civilized contrasts the reality. She herself turns out to be hypocrite and morally degraded. Her morality is going to be lost. Irony functions, here, as a tool to reveal the attitude of upper-class people upon lower-class. Kitty, being an upper-class, behaves with Margaret as lower class lady because Margaret is from a poor family. But actually Kitty's behavior reveals herself as a lower class woman because of her immoral behavior which can be understood through the narration of Jenny:

Our visitor met her eyes. This was evidently a moment for which she had steeled herself, and she rose to it with a catch of her breath. "A man who used to be a clerk along with my husband is in Mr. Baldry regiment." Her voice croaked even more piteously, and her eyes

begged: "leave it at that! Leave it at that! If you only knew-"[. . .] (23-24)

West's irony is directed to refute the domination and exploitation of so-called civilized and sophisticated society but her use of irony is not so easily understood because of its complex use. So, irony functions here, as a rhetorical device and for the understanding of ironic meaning of the novel it needs to have the knowledge of rhetoric as said by Claire Colebrook in his article: "What is primary is speech that 'we' all know and understand. Irony is *rhetorical* because it is used as a figure or technique to say or convey some other meaning, albeit with greater force, economy or effect. If irony were to become absolute then we would lose the rich value of shared understanding" (41). The ironic meaning of West hence, can be understood through the rhetoric meaning of the words.

West not only tries to ironize the effects of war but also she focuses her irony upon the class discrimination existing in postwar British society through her novel. By presenting Margaret as a marginalized woman, West tries to resist the brutality of upper class women in the British society. West ironizes the attitude of the so-called sophisticated and upper class women of the society through the characters Kitty and Jenny. For instance, Jenny narrates her own and Kitty's inhuman behavior upon Margaret:

I pushed the purse (that is of Margaret) away from me with my toe, and hated her as the rich hate the poor as insect things that will struggle out of the crannies which are their decent home and introduce ugliness to the light of day. And Kitty said with a voice shaken with pitilessness: "You are impertinent. I know exactly what you are doing. You have read in the 'Harrow Observer' or somewhere that my

husband is at the front and you come to tell this story because you think that you will get some money [. . .]” (25-26).

West’s politics is to subvert the unusual aspect of society. She wants to look society from marginalized women’s perspective. There is the tension between patriarchal ideology and marginalized female ideology where Margaret, a female character from marginal group, carries out a significant role of curing a male character Chris. So, by presenting a potential female character from marginal group West directs her approach towards transideological politics of irony. There is no affection and humanly behavior of Kitty and Jenny to some extent towards Margaret. They look Margaret stereotypically as a lower class. Rebecca West attacks upon Kitty and Jenny to show their attitude towards Margaret: “For a long time we watched her as she went along the drive, her yellowish raincoat looking sick and bright in the sharp sunshine, her black plumes nodding like the pines above, her cheap boots making her walk on her hills, a spreading stain on the fabric of our life” (30-31).

Rebecca West attacks upon upper class British people who want to expose their superiority towards others. Her politics is to refute the immoral aspect of the post war British society. Here, Kitty exposes herself as a beautiful and with the upper class values of woman. It is an ironical situation that Rebecca West tries to focus from Kitty’s behavior, the hypocritical and immoral activities. People think themselves as highly civilized but their reality goes beyond their behavior. Kitty is trying to show Margaret as deceiving lady despite being herself ignorant towards her own responsibility when Margaret is informing her about Chris’s illness. The following paragraph cited from *The Return of the Soldier* exemplifies the afore-said claim:

“I am sorry I’ve upset you. But when you a thing like that it isn’t in flesh and blood to keep it from his wife. I am a married woman myself, and I know. I knew Mr. Baldry fifteen years ago.” Her voice freely

confessed that she had taken a liberty. "Quite a friend of the family he was." She had added that touch to soften the crude surprisingness of her announcement. It hardly did. "We lost sight of each other. Its fifteen years since we last met. I had never seen nor heard of him nor thought to do again till I got this a week ago". (27-28)

In the paragraph, Margaret shows her innocence of the information she is giving to Kitty about Chris's illness. Similarly, all of the complex and ambiguous activities reflect the asocial and immoral activities of the post war British society. Rebecca West relates her ironical strategy with the sociopolitical and historical evidences. After the rejection of Chris, Margaret is left to her solitude and with no increase of pleasant feelings that she was sorry for losing her love. Chris was very soon going beyond her eyes; and she remained without sight and sound of any companion. She could almost have thought about Chris. But that is also impossible for Chris to forget her so entirely.

Chris's possessive nature and his rejection of Margaret is an evidence of patriarchal authority. Margaret's intension to clarify her relationship with Bert Batchard, nephew to Mr. Batchard 'who keeps the inn at Surly Hall' and Chris's rejection to listen her brings the great breach in their relationship. The following paragraph, spoken by Margaret, clarifies the above-mentioned issue:

And there was Chris, standing up there among the poplars straight and black, and not a smile on him. I felt very bad. We picked him in the dinghy and took him across, and still he didn't smile. He and I got on the island and Bert, who saw there was something wrong, said, "Well I'll toddle off." And there I was on the lawn with Chris, and he angry and somehow miles away. I remember him saying, here am I coming

to say goodbye, because I must go away to-night and I find you larking with that bounder (100-101).

It is the instance of dramatic irony which brings a great change in the story. Because of the confusion of Chris, he happens to think that Margaret has a relationship with Bert more than they actually have. Though, Margaret tries to clarify saying “O Chris, I’ve known Bert all my life through him coming to his uncle for the holidays, and we weren’t larking. It was only that he couldn’t row” (101). But, her words do not make any change in his confused mind which he assumes to be true. Chris is deceived by his own sight and irony arises from the difference between what he sees and what actually is.

It is the dexterity of Rebecca West that she, along with dramatic irony, brings the instances of political irony where Margaret narrates about Chris’s not listening to her when she was clarifying her relationship with Bert. As she tells the consequences to Jenny, it has been understood that Chris inferiorizes Margaret because of her lower class status. It is Margaret, who even does not pull herself back while Chris presents himself cruelly when we read the conversation between Margaret and Jenny:

And he went on talking, and then it struck me he wasn’t trusting me as he would trust a girl of his class, and I told him so, and he went on being cruel. Oh, don’t make me remember the things we said to each other! It doesn’t help. At last I said something awful, and he said: ‘very well; I agree. I’ll go,’[. . .]. (101-2)

Irony is concerned with Margaret’s struggle against Chris’s cruelty. These lines tell us about how Margaret is spending a life of regression. She is a character of double marginalization both from men as well as women. Despite getting lots of suffering, Margaret gets married with William Grey and says that she is living a happy life.

Rebecca West has used irony from a feminist point of view to question the hegemonic

ideology as Hutcheon says: “Irony questions the hegemonic ideology in deconstructive way” (112) as seen Margaret, being a female character seems happy also in her suffering but ironically her happiness questions the existence of Baldry family’s patriarchal ideology.

It is the strategy of Rebecca West to find out the patriarchal intrigues among the Baldry society. She presents Margaret innocently in her outer reality but actually she wants to expose the politics of Baldry society through the relationship between Margaret and Bert.

Margaret’s politics is to involve in the most of political activities of Baldry society with Chris. Through the relationship with Chris, Margaret is trying to enter into the higher social position of patriarchal society. Entering into the high position of Baldry society she wants to reform the so-called patriarchal ideology of Chris Baldry and other authoritative members of Baldry society. Rebecca West’s politics of irony to use in Hutcheon’s words has a social dimension:

Irony is the relational strategy in the sense that it appears not only between ironic meaning; comes into being as the consequence of relationship, as dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning makers. [. . .] The social dimension of this relational aspect of irony is the subject of [. . .] the discursive communities and their role in enabling and comprehending of irony. (59)

Irony is related with the various sociopolitical aspects like: culture, religion, tradition and others. Irony may not be meaningful without these issues. It depends upon its meaning makers. These meaning makers are the discursive communities which enable the politics of irony.

Chris’s belief that Margaret should remain in his possession remains meaningless, when Margaret innocently starts to revolt against him. Irony here gets

more heated when Kitty tries to impart her authority (through Jenny) towards Margaret in lovely manner and Margaret tries to reveal her authority as an innocent girl. The conflict is the space of politics of irony because the context determines what is to be irony and what is not. Irony emerges from the activities of people, what they seem and what they actually are. It would surely harm that Kitty Baldry's reputation, her comfort and even her so-called sophisticated manner thereby negating the British upper class's prejudices. West's irony is a relational strategy both to impose authority and to reveal it. Kitty baldry's strategy is to impose her authority upon Margaret in lovely manner and Margaret's strategy is to reveal that authority innocently.

Since, West is fascinated to depict the themes and materials of her novel about existing social, cultural and political values, she has given the description of so-called civilized patriarchal ideology and its moral failure in *The Return of the Soldier*. Although, the society is confined within the limited places, families and characters, it gives a clear picture of social structure and women's condition.

West sets her irony on Kitty baldry's conventional sophisticated manners when she thinks herself living a standard and sophisticated life. She spends her time in an unprogressive way, when it did not put herself to inconveniency; she engages herself in insignificant works. Politics of irony is to show the hypocrite behavior of upper class women. Though Kitty Baldry gives much more attention upon superior living standard but does not care her husband well. The following extract is highly illustrative to justify this point narrated by Jenny:

There was a noise above us like the fluttering of doves. Kitty was coming downstairs in a white serge dress against which her hands were rosy; a woman with such lovely little hands never needed to wear flowers. By her kind of physical discipline she had reduced her grief to no more than a slight darkening under the eyes, and for this moment

she was glowing [. . .]. Not that it would have made any difference if she had seen him. Beautiful women of her type lose, in this matter of admiration alone, their otherwise tremendous sense of class distinction; they are obscurely aware that it is their civilizing mission to flash the jewel of their beauty before all men, so that they shall desire it and work to get the wealth to buy it, and thus be seduced by present appetite to a tilling of the earth that serves the future. (149-50)

Margaret's love affair with Chris, a wealthy young man to spend happy and sophisticated life and his abrupt abandonment to her is an ironic representation.

Margaret becomes happy in her relationship with Chris because she thinks that she is going to marry a rich and prestigious man, without taking into consideration that he can leave and betray her because of the incongruity in the class status. He is the representative of patriarchy. Chris's intention to marry with Margaret becomes failure when Chris sees Margaret with Bert 'larking' in the lake. His patriarchal authority does not function so well and he himself becomes failure. In Margaret Allington, we have the first excellent example of distinctively modern type, the person who cultivates the style of sensitivity, motherly kindness, virtue and intelligence. But her reality is opposite. She is not a highly positioned woman in the society. She seems hypocritical and coquetry in her first meeting with Kitty and Jenny at Baldry Court.

West represents Margaret commenting on her through Jenny:

Just beneath us, in one of Kitty's prettiest chintz arm-chairs, sat a middle-aged woman. She wore a yellowish raincoat and a black hat with plumes. The sticky straw hat had only lately been renovated by something out of a little bottle bought at the chemist's. she had rolled her black thread gloves into a ball on her lap, so that she could turn her gray alpaca skirt well above her muddy boots and adjust its brush-

braid with a seamed red hand that looked even more worn when she presently raised it to touch the glistening flowers of the pink azalea that stood on a table beside her. (16-17)

Here, irony initiates that Margaret is suitable for Chris but Chris, because of confusion, abandons her as he thinks he is not suitable for her. Politics of irony is to reveal the materialistic attitude of British upper class society. It is an ironical situation of British people that they think ideally but their behaviors remain materialistic. Materialistic attitude of British people is amplified even through the attitude of Kitty and Jenny towards Margaret. The following paragraph cited from the novel exemplifies the afore-mentioned claim:

Her body was long and round and shapely, and with a noble squareness of the shoulders; her fair hair curled diffidently about a good brow; her grey eyes, though they were remote, as if anything worth looking at in her life had kept a long way off, were full of tenderness; and though she was slender; there was something about her of the wholesome, endearing heaviness of the ox or the trusted big dog. Yet she was bad enough. She was repulsively furred with neglect and poverty, as even a good glove that has dropped down behind a bed in a hotel and has lain undisturbed for a day or two is repulsive when the chambermaid retrieves it from the dust and fluff. (17-18)

In the above paragraph, Margaret is evaluated through her attire comparing her with animalistic attributes, though she has been there in Baldry Court to give the information about the illness of Chris.

Irony is an interactive process which arises from one another's view. It emerges from the difference between said and unsaid one. This ironic framework is conceptual and interactive in certain discourses. Irony comes through the interaction

of two different dimensions. Ironic meaning is always relational and inclusive. Most of the ironical strategies are concerned with the feminist assumptions. Female writers use irony to equate themselves with males in the domestic to political intrigues as Hutcheon says- 'Rebecca West's ironic strategy is also for female equality and rights as well as class in the social activities'. Margaret's feminine role equates with male when she plays a vital role in curing Chris. Her class status also rises higher in the society as she becomes able in curing Chris rather than the so-called sophisticated women of Baldry Court. The following paragraph cited from *The Return of the Soldier* exemplifies the afore-said claim:

We kissed not as women, but as lovers do; I think we each embraced that part of Chris the other had absorbed by her love. She took the jersey and the ball, and clasped them as though they were a child.

When she got to the door she stopped and leaned against the lintel. Her head fell back; her eyes closed; her mouth was contorted as though she swallowed bitter drink. (181)

The above extract shows the arising of consciousness upon Jenny's concept towards Margaret when Margaret successfully and dedicatedly cures Chris. Along with Jenny, Kitty also has the changed attitude towards Margaret which elevates Margaret's class to the higher position.

Jenny shows her love towards Chris which is the instance of incest love relationship because Jenny is his cousin. West uses irony to show Chris and Jenny's love relationship. Her politics is to warn us about an ideal form of love. But actually such incest love relationship cannot exist in the society. The narrator Jenny loves Chris, her own cousin brother to resist the conventional thought of love. It is an ironical representation of Rebecca West to threaten the old culture of time. Here, love functions as a social interaction. The above-mentioned issue of incest love can be

clarified through the following point when Jenny expresses her jealousy towards the past relationship of Chris and Margaret:

Then suddenly I was stunned with jealousy. It was not their love for each other that caused me such agony at that moment; it was the thought of the things their eyes had rested upon together. I imagined that white hawthorn among the poplars by the ferry on which they had looked fifteen years ago at the Monkey Island and it was more than I could bear. (124)

West has taken money ironically as a weapon to measure the culture and its standard. Though, money is an essential thing in human life but her characters have taken that money as great affection. Margaret has shown her great love for money through her relationship with Chris and in the same way, Kitty and Jenny's social position also has been measured through money. That was the reality of so-called civilized British culture. But the ironic implication of West upside downs the social position of Kitty and Jenny as Margaret reaches to the higher position for her devotion and compassion towards Chris who had left her ignoring her innocence. Irony in *The Return of the Soldier* is not for social freedom but for the depiction of contemporary social equilibrium. It takes full notice of spiritedness, vivacity, clarity and likeness but only to reject them as having nothing to do with virtue and happiness, as being indeed, determines the good life.

West stresses repeatedly that while Kitty and Jenny give an outward appearance of morality and gentle manners while curing Chris, these aspects cover a hollow core, a typical example occurs in the following extract where Margaret is seemed much serious in the illness of Chris than kitty and Jenny:

We gaped at her who said this of our splendid Chris, and I saw that she was not as she had been. There was a directness of speech, a straight

stare that was for her a frenzy. "Doctor," she said, her mild voice roughened, "what's the use of talking? You can't cure him,"- she caught her lower lip with her teeth and fought back from the brink of tears,-"make him happy, I mean. All you can do is to make him ordinary". (164)

Irony lies here in Kitty and Jenny's attitude upon Margaret. Though, they think that Margaret still has intention to marry with Chris but Margaret is doing all her help only through her morality and righteousness. West's ironic effect functions as the modern political tool to reveal the social mobility and staticity during her time. She shows the humorous and ambiguous nature of Mrs. Kitty Baldry and Jenny. Irony does not only lie in the ironist's intention nor is it solely found in text without the participation of the interpreters. The irony instead comes out of "Dynamic and plural relations among the context or utterance (and its context), the so-called ironist, the interpreters, and the circumstances surrounding the discursive situation" (11) as said by Hutcheon.

West explores more complex issues through politics of irony: whether with Margaret's particular combination of interrelated weakness and strengths; she lives an independent (though married to William Grey) or the relationship with Chris is advantageous to both and whether she will share Chris's ambivalent attitude toward sex, where irony is to reveal the sexual politics. Chris, after the return from war front, remains in confusion whether to love Margaret or to love Kitty for his sexual familial satisfaction.

Unlike politics of irony, this research explores the ironic consequences and ironic results of the war in the novel *The Return of the Soldier*. Basically, according to Paul Fussell as reviewed by Robert Darby "there are two ways of interpreting the cultural impact of the First World War: first as the creation of 'modern memory', 'a tendency' 'associated with' Paul Fussell, and secondly a 'traditional approach'," as

written by Robert Darby in *The Hotspur-Falstaff Spectrum: Paul Fussell and the Ironies of War*. (311) As Darby further elaborates:

The first option sees modern memory as ‘the creation of a new language of truth telling about the war’ and is linked with modernism. The traditional option involves ‘patriotic certainties, “high diction” [. . .] euphemisms about battle, “glory” and the “hallowed dead” in sum the sentimentality and the lies of wartime propaganda’. (311)

Apart from any cherishing modernity that the war can bring, West shows her dislike of it. She shows Jenny expressing her contempt for modern times: “why had modern life brought forth these horrors that the old tragedies seem no more than nursery shows?” (57). It seems that the war had covered all the things with a blanket of strangeness, leaving its sad mask everywhere, “how sad dance music has sounded ever since the war began” (41). And the sky also is different. Behind Chris’s head, as he halted at the open window, a search light turned all ways in the night like a sword brandished among stars” (57).

West does not expose the glorious aspects of the war and its impact on human life; neither has she exposed patriotic certainties, nor ‘euphemisms about battle’. Unlike the conception of common human mind, she delineates war ironically. In her portrayal of Chris, his homecoming brings the visible effects of the war. His memory loss is the proof of the impact of modern warfare in the mind. The statement ‘Chris is ill’ is repeated several times throughout the novel as a way to hit here the still uncertain truth, that is, the war can savage a man’s mind not just body, and that the suffering it causes is as real and dramatic as physical wound.

Chris Baldry’s experience is West’s evidence that ‘the myth of the war experience’ was real and it had devastating consequences for many. The aim of the war was to regain law, morality, virtue, faith and conscience. The old values

embedded in Baldry Court that Jenny refers to were seen as a means of personal and national regeneration. Manliness was the embodiment of those ideals: courage, strength, hardness, control over passions and the ability to protect the moral fabric of society.

Chris's portrayal as a dependent, child-like and reliant being in the hands of women could be more distant from the image of soldier as the embodiment of the essence of manliness; instead, it shows the man and his 'hallowed' image ironically, embodied with feminine characteristics.

The impact of war has overshadowed the 'happiness' with the dark shadow impending, which Jenny perceives: "he was to be as happy as a ring cast into the sea is lost, as a man whose coffin has lain for centuries beneath the sod is dead" (176). Jenny realizes that happiness is but a "trivial toy" (179). Happiness is the paradoxical result of safety; it makes one blind to the normative reality of life and therefore immature, helpless and ultimately foolish, as Jenny would come to realize by comparing Chris to "[a]doddering young man" should he be kept from the certainty of life.

The reversal of gender role is also an ironic implication of war by Rebecca West in the novel. Interestingly, Kitty wears expensive clothes assuming the role of rich married woman but ironically her appearance as well as her attire exposes her as the classical parasite. "Around her throat were her pearls, and her longer chain of diamonds dropped [. . .] Kitty knitted her brows, for she hates gracefulness and a failure of physical adjustment is the worst indignity she can conceive" (49-50).

West's construction of Kitty's character descends onto the group of the conventional gender role of the wife, on the other hand, Margaret and Jenny's characters are the instances of a new awareness in the path of gender deconstruction, when we can see both being involved in the masculine duty to cure Chris and resettle

the family life. They are the instances of West's female characters holding far-sighted capacities and the resourcefulness to act as cultural heroes who may some day emancipate the world.

Chris, on the other hand, is in opposite role than the expectations and the constraints imposed by the society and his role is reinvented by altering his role or appearance in an unconventional way. His gender subversion is reflected in his change of character, his boyish, emotional and affective manner, as well as his posture and outward behavior.

Therefore, if we elongate the specific situation of Chris baldry to other cases of World War I, combatants suffering from war neurosis that have somehow failed to conform with the gender norm and consequently subverted the concept of hegemonic masculinity, we can successfully apply Paul Fussell's model of 'ironies of war' as reviewed by Robert Darby:

Nor am I sure, as Adrian Gregory seems to imply, that Fussell is arguing that as a result of the war, all our perceptions become ironic; I think his project is more limited to show the emergence of an ironic attitude to war and to the deceitful officialese by which its realities were softened. The writers he admires were not crudely anti-war: they wanted to communicate the horrors of trench fighting to an ignorant home front which continued to think in the old language of glorious battle and noble sacrifice, and thus had no conception of the truth. To achieve this aim and discredit the former, irony was a powerful weapon. (313)

If Rebecca West is to present war as chivalrous and elevating she would be using the "language of patriotic certainty" or "high diction" as Fussell uses the terms, rather, she condemns the war and its consequences. "[. . .] the system of heightened

phraseology , popularized by the vogue for medieval romance in Victorian England, in which common words such as ‘soldier’, ‘conquer’ and ‘die’ were replaced by ‘warrior’, ‘vanquish’ or ‘perish’ and a draft notice was a summons” (316). In the very title of the novel Rebecca West does not mention “The Return of the Warrior” rather she uses the low diction of “soldier” to expose her ironic implication of war.

The ironic consequence of the war is also found in the awaiting of Kitty and Jenny. Though, both of them await Chris possessively but he forgets Kitty as his wife and wants Margaret overwhelmingly. The extract given below clarifies the issue that how war can devastate an individual life as well as familial life when we read the amnesiac Chris and Kitty’s conversation:

“I knew my conduct must seem to you perversely insulting,”

-behind him the search-light wheeled while he gripped the sides of the window, -“but if I do not see Margaret Allington I shall die.” She raised her hands to her jewels, and pressed the cool globes of her pearls into the flesh. “She lives near here,” she said easily. “I will send the car down for her to-morrow. You shall see as much of her as you like.”

(57-58)

In the above paragraph we can see Chris’s longing for the past. He forgets of his present life and intensely longs for the past. His nostalgia drags him to his past life which he likes more than the present devastated life as written by Linda Hutcheon in her article: “The aesthetics of nostalgia might, therefore, be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection, the invocation of a partial, idealized history merges with dissatisfaction with the present” (27). His forgetfulness is his nostalgia for the past life.

Chris is nostalgic in his desire to possess Margaret after he returns back from the shellshock but he cannot regain his past life and past love relationship with Margaret.

It is his 'dissatisfaction' to be in the present world which is devastated by the war and is also the 'dissatisfaction' of Rebecca West to the postwar British society. Chris's character acquires a feeling of sensibility, a sense of nostalgia, a particular emotional state, together with a certain passivity and stillness that brought him closer to the feminine shelter of Baldry Court than to the masculine world of trenches. His nostalgia for pre war life and for his son, clarifies the ironic attitude of West.

West ironizes the war by depicting the insignificant return of the soldier whose glorious return was awaited at home by his wife and cousin but to their horror, the soldier returns being amnesiac and losing his masculine character. The narrator, Chris's cousin Jenny, states at the beginning of the novel that "like most English women of [her] time [she] was wishing the return of a soldier" (7). It is this waiting and Chris's return which ironizes the war by ironizing the return of the soldier who fought as a "front-line soldier" and returned to Baldry Court in a feminine appearance.

In the last lines of the novel, West makes the ironic expression regarding war, which dismantles the explicit happy-ending of the novel by exposing the brutality and prolongation of war provoking the re-return of the soldier to the war-fare as we read Kitty and Jenny's conversation:

Kitty asks "Jenny! Jenny! How does he look?"

"Oh," -how could I say it, -"every inch a soldier."

She crept behind me to the window, peered over my shoulder and saw.

I heard her suck her breath with satisfaction. "He's cured!" She

whispered slowly. "He's cured!" (185)

Here, "He's cured" (185) means he is capable and 'well enough to return to the war'. Hence, West's presenting of politics of irony and ironic consequences of war are intentional because she intends to ironize the postwar British society and simultaneously she intends to ironize the nostalgia of the people and effects of war

where war could not become the herald of peace and harmony in the British society, rather it brought disruption, fragmentation and illness. Chris's amnesia, misunderstanding in the family, his nostalgia and changing nature of Kitty and Jenny's perspective on Margaret are the ironic instances which Rebecca West intentionally has built in the novel. No reader can escape from these ironic implications in the novel because West has deliberately created these situations to be read and understood by the readers. Wayne C. Booth states: "They are all intended, deliberately created by human beings to be heard or read and understood with some precision by other human beings; they are not mere openings, provided unconsciously, or accidental statements allowing the confirmed pursuer of ironies to read them against the author" (5).

In addition, it seems that in this novel, there are no instances of battle gallantry or heroism, only death, disease, decay and devastation. The violence of war has dismantled the human body which gained dreadful traces throughout the book. Along with this, the uneasiness toward war neurosis is reflected in the attitudes of female characters, Kitty and Jenny, who struggle to acknowledge with Chris's mental injury. The ending of the novel also does not give the escapes from the trenches of war because Chris's well-being is his being able to return to the war. All these instances are ironically presented to ironize the war and its effects.

### III. Effects of War in the Society

Reading a text from the perspective of ironization of sense of loss and nostalgia and the ironization of the war is what the present thesis is concerned with. Along with this, the intended irony of Rebecca West is also explored. Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* shows the sense of loss and nostalgia ironically. It also exposes the connection between style and ideology where she raises some of the sociopolitical issues from her ironical strategy. She uses irony to dramatize the crisis of so-called patriarchal ideology in one hand and ironic consequences of sense of loss, nostalgia and the effects of war in the British society on the other. Her politics of irony is most subversive one that reveals her inner thought about woman's liberation and individual freedom. It subverts the conventional patriarchal ideology and brings women at the central role.

The nostalgia of Kitty and Jenny breaks apart instantly when they discover Chris's amnesia. In his amnesiac condition, Chris does not remember Kitty as his wife, rather he intensely longs for his past love Margaret. In this regard, kitty and Jenny's nostalgia turns into an ironic end. Similarly, Chris's longing for Margaret as in the life of 1901 is a nostalgia that West wants to show. His nostalgia is the nostalgia for pre-war idyllic life where there was harmony and peace in the society. Ironically, this harmonious and peaceful pre-war life has turned into fragmentation and disjunction. Chris's amnesia is cured when he is presented his dead son's play things and clothes. It is also the ironic instance of the nostalgia of the people of British society for the pre-war life.

The tension between patriarchal norms and values and the feminine ideology that is the materialistic and idealistic view is skillfully presented in *The Return of the Soldier*. Chris Baldry represents the conservative patriarch who wants to impose his superiority over Margaret. His abandonment of Margaret is his patriarch superiority

that he wants to impose. But Margaret as a feminine character ironically undercuts his all authority. She also ignores him as he abandons her and gets married to Mr. William Grey. More than this, the abandoned Margaret has to function as a mother-figure in curing his amnesia.

Here, politics of irony is not only for male patriarchy but also for class superiority. The class superiority is reflected through the attitude of Kitty and Jenny towards Margaret. Their attitude takes an ironic turn when they witness the reality as said by Margaret which they have earlier thought to be false. Though they want to inferiorize Margaret, but Margaret does not hinder from the reality and their conception ends in irony. So, first West uses the irony to reflect the unusual aspects of society then she again uses irony to reduce that very unusual aspects. Both Kitty and Jenny take the information of Chris's illness given by Margaret as false information. But ironically that comes to be true when they receive the letter from Frank Baldry informing about Chris's illness. When Kitty and Jenny find out the truth, ironically they themselves fall to the immoral human position which they were trying to do with Margaret. Not only Kitty and Jenny but Chris also shows the class superiority. When he sees Margaret with Bert Batchard in Monkey Island his ironic conception to the situation makes him to make a decision of abandonment. He without concerning the plight of Margaret abandons her and gets married with Kitty. It is because of her lower economic status that Chris makes such decision. But ironic situation comes when Chris longs her intensely in his amnesiac condition and she only cures him but does not want to live with him.

Rebecca West represents the postwar British society as devastated and fragmented to ironize the World War I itself. Her use of words and character's condition do not show the war in positive response. The fragmented family life, illness and ironic nostalgia only ironize the war. Chris's nostalgia and his illness give

him the feminine quality and the deeds and endeavor of the female characters like Margaret, Kitty and Jenny to cure him show their masculinity. So, West shows the reversed gender role to ironize the war. West's ironic implication of the war is intended. She intentionally tries to ironize the war and its consequences.

West's representation of the postwar British society is highly admirable. The representations of the characters' antithetical mindsets notice the ideological confrontation between good and evil. Along with the failure of the so-called patriarchal ideology and the class hierarchic motive of Kitty and Jenny, other unusual and contradictory aspects are also important. The nostalgia of Kitty and Jenny for Chris, the nostalgia of Chris for the pre-war life, the ironic and stereotypical conception of Chris, Kitty and Jenny towards Margaret are the instances of instability among the British culture. In this regard Rebecca West uses irony to reveal such conditions which were prevalent in the contemporary time. Her politics of irony and her ironic implication towards the consequences of the war are intended to reduce such complex, ambiguous and unusual aspects of the time.

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