



## The Return of the Soldier

Rebecca West

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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*The Return of the Soldier* is the first novel written by British author Rebecca West. Published in 1918, it was also the first novel about the repercussions of the war for returning soldiers and the first and only novel written by a woman about the war during the war. The returning soldier is Chris Baldry, an upper class English gentleman who returns from the trenches suffering from shell shock and memory loss. He is stuck at age 20, has lost his memory of the ensuing fifteen years, which encompass his marriage and the loss of his son, and is fixated on a woman with whom he had once had a summer fling. The story is told from the somewhat limited and unreliable perspective of his cousin Jenny in a non-linear, modernist style. A sense of displacement

and uncertainty is pervasive, as is the influence of memory and sexual desire. The reappearance of Margaret, the summer lover, along with the efforts of a psychoanalyst and key artifacts of the past lead to Baldry's eventual recovery. *The Return of the Soldier* was neglected in Rebecca West's extensive oeuvre but has become acknowledged as a masterpiece that treats a difficult and elusive subject realistically and without undue sentimentality. It was made into a film by the same name in 1982 starring Alan Bates as Chris Baldry and co-starring Julie Christie, Ian Holm, Glenda Jackson and Ann-Margret.

**Rebecca West** is the *nom de plume* of **Dame Cicely Isabel Fairfield** (December 21, 1892 – March 15, 1983), a British author, journalist, literary critic and travel writer. She was prolific and mastered several genres, writing reviews for numerous newspapers and periodicals, covering the Nuremberg trials for *The New Yorker*, a masterpiece on the history and culture of Yugoslavia, and novels such as *The Return of the Soldier* and her autobiographical "Aubrey trilogy". In 1947 *Time* called her "indisputably the world's number one woman writer".

She was born in Kerry, Ireland. Her mother was a Scotswoman and accomplished pianist; her father was an Anglo-Irish journalist who deserted the family when Cicely was eight years old. The family moved to Edinburgh, where she was schooled until age 16. She trained as an actress in London and took the name Rebecca West from the character of the rebellious heroine of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. She became involved in the suffrage movement and wrote for the feminist weekly *Freewoman* and the *Clarion*. A criticism of H. G. Wells led to an invitation to lunch, which led to a ten-year affair that produced her son, Anthony West. She married banker Henry Maxwell Andrews in 1937 and accumulated considerable wealth through her literary efforts. She was made CBE in 1949 and DBE in 1959.

William Shawn, editor in chief of the *New Yorker*, said at her death: "Rebecca West was one of the giants and will have a lasting place in English literature. No one in this century wrote more dazzling prose, or had more wit, or looked at the intricacies of human character and the ways of the world more intelligently."