ULUSLARARASI DİL, EDEBİYAT VE KÜLTÜR ARAŞTIRMALARI DERGİSİ

udekad

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE RESEARCHES

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИХ, ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЧЕСКИХ И КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ

Cilt: 4, Sayı: 2, 2021

Vol: 4, Issue: 2, 2021

Sayfa – Page: 356-365

E-ISSN: 2667-4262

TRAUMA OF WAR IN REBECCA WEST'S *THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER*

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: *25.09.2021*

Accepted: *29.11.2021*

Keywords:
War novel,
shell-shock,
Rebecca West,
The Return of the Soldier,
war trauma.

Research Article

ABSTRACT

This paper aims particularly at discussing how the trauma of twentieth-century warfare challenges the metanarratives that construct and instruct the idea of nation, and how trauma connects individuals with this ideology in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918). The novel successfully portrays different levels of disturbances caused by the trauma of war one of which is Chris's rejection of recalling his wife to find a kind of internal unity in an unsafe world. In the novel, shell-shocked Chris's trauma strikingly leads to the narrative exploration of female subjectivity in states of psychological crisis. In fact, the story suggests many similarities between surviving at the battlefront and homefront while exploring the effects of war on men as well as women. In the novel, Chris's war trauma makes other major characters of the novel question their social and gender roles framed by the Edwardian society compelling them to re-evaluate the nature of institutional systems in relation to gender conflict; thus, *The Return of the Soldier* successfully places men's and women's traumas in conjunction with one another in a more puzzling connection.

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Geliş: *25.09.2021*

Kabul: *29.11.2021*

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Savaş romanı,
şarapnel-şoku,
Rebecca West,
Askerin Dönüşü,
savaş travması.

Araştırma Makalesi

ÖZET

Bu makale özellikle yirminci yüzyıl savaşı travmasının ulus fikrini oluşturan ve öğreten üst anlatıları nasıl sorguladığını ve Rebecca West'in *Askerin Dönüşü* (1918) adlı eserinde bireyleri bu ideolojiyle nasıl ilişkilendirdiğini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Roman, savaş travmasının neden olduğu farklı rahatsızlık düzeylerini başarılı bir şekilde tasvir etmektedir; bunlardan biri, Chris'in güvenli olmayan bir dünyada bir tür bağdaşım bulmak için karısını hatırlamayı reddetmesidir. Romanda, şoka uğramış Chris'in travması çarpıcı bir şekilde psikolojik kriz durumlarında kadın öznelliğinin anlatısal keşfini beraberinde getirir. Aslında hikâye, savaşın hem erkekler hem de kadınlar üzerindeki etkilerini araştırırken, savaş cephesinde ve ev cephesinde hayatta kalmak arasında birçok benzerlik olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Romanda, Chris'in savaş travması, romanın diğer ana karakterlerini, Edward dönemi toplumu tarafından oluşturulmuş sosyal ve toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini sorgulamaya iterek, onları kurumsal sistemlerin doğasını, toplumsal cinsiyet çatışmasıyla ilgili olarak yeniden değerlendirmeye zorlamaktadır; böylece, *Askerin Dönüşü*, erkek ve kadın travmalarını daha muammalı bir bağlantıda başarıyla bir araya getirmektedir.

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Bu makaleyi şu şekilde kaynak gösterebilirsiniz / To cite this article (APA):
Okuroğlu Özün, Şule (2021). "Trauma of War in Rebecca West's *The Return Of The Soldıer*". *Uluslararası Dil, Edebiyat ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi (UDEKAD)*, 4 (2): 356-365. DOI: https://doi.org/10.37999/udekad.1000822.

Introduction

The Great War has been rhetorically "*a potent myth, symbolizing the crisis of a civilization*" (Bergonzi 1965: 220). In Western discourse it is also associated with the Biblical Fall, "a radical discontinuity" (Hynes 1998: ix) in history, and changed the perception of reality sharply dividing history "*into three sections—pre-war, war, and post-war*" periods (Aldington 1984: 199). Particularly in British History, although the pre-war years were considered a "*great chasm to a remote, peaceable*" chronotope referring to "*incredibly distant years*" (Hynes 1998: ix), the post-war period was regarded as a damaged period, *"shorn of its high-rhetorical top"* creating *"an anxious fearful bitter nation*" (Hynes 1990:353).The dominating binary of 'public/private' in the Victorian society also informed the Edwardian period - known for classiness and luxury among the rich and powerful - as well as the construction of the War in literary narratives allocating men and women to their separate spheres: men to the public, women to the private.

During and after the War, women who were regarded as the weaker sex had to take their fathers', brothers', and husbands' places at the workplaces as their substitutes. A majority of the women's texts produced during and just after the Great War particularly pronounced and contributed to the persistence of essentialist notions of gendered identity by making use of the patriarchal discourse. Some of the novels interrogated, through suggestive and indirect means, the relationship between the 'sheltered' non-combatant female subjects and their shell-shocked male contemporaries. Both physical and psychological devastation of the war on the individuals was great; furthermore, the trauma of the destruction had no gender. When Elaine Showalter asserts that in the trenches, "*men were silenced and immobilized and forced, like women, to express their conflicts through the body*" she refers to a connection between the male 'shell-shock' and the purported hysteria of women regarding shell-shock as a revolt against the social construction of masculinity and its connotations (1987: 171).

The Return of the Soldier is one of the most significant English novels by a female writer about shell-shock and one of the early examples featuring a psychiatrist. Shell shock, which can lead to intense stress, depression, amnesia, inability to sleep, or incorrect reasoning, is a World War I term used for the type of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by the exposure to active warfare particularly by being under bombardment and fighting. The soldier of the title, Chris Baldry, develops amnesia to forget traumas of the war, returning mentally to the year 1901, and escapes from his familial responsibilities as an upper-class gentleman who is the head of an elegant estate. By using the war to uncover other traumas, West captivatingly explores British social structure and how it entraps both male and female subjects in the form of public or private traumas. Particularly the novel's pessimism is portrayed by its characters' devotion to social conventions that are important in war paradigms, such as rigidly enforced codes of acceptable feminine and masculine traits. West also suggests an elucidation as Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate assert: *The Return of the Soldier* is "*the best-known war novel to explore women's healing power*" (1997:11).

Threshold Identities: Jenny, Kitty, Margaret, and Chris

The Return of the Soldier can be defined as "*a special example of an established English genre: a 'country house' novel, but a wartime one that is dominated by women*" (Hynes 1990: 212). Shell-shocked Chris, to whom the title of the novel refers, does not remember his past years with Kitty, his wife, and the death of her son Oliver believing that he is still in love with a lower class woman, Margaret Allington Grey, whom he was dating with fifteen years earlier. Amnesia acts as a retreat, a survival strategy, for Chris since his loss of memory provides him with a secure space where he alienates himself from the codes of a brave soldier and social obligations. In this third space he escapes from the realities of the war.

In the novel, West makes use of shell-shocked Chris as a trope for the metanarrative of patriarchal male community since this shell-shocked veteran threatens the unitary nature of patriarchy. Thus, West astutely constructs individual female subjectivity in direct relation to the traumatized male subjectivity. Chris's war trauma makes other major characters of the novel question their roles framed by the society compelling them re-evaluate the nature of institutional systems in relation to gender conflict. Harold Orel calls the novel "*a factitious world which has recourse to stock formulae to bring about an implausible and even reprehensible fictional resolution*" (1986:124-25).

"S*et in a claustrophobic and often lonely domestic atmosphere in which three women vie for Chris's attentions*", the novel tries to point out that *"women might find some purpose to their lives apart from domesticity*" (Pulsifer 2013: 45). Although Chris, as the soldier of the story, is regarded as the central character of the plot, three women and their search for individuality dominate the story. West interestingly chooses to narrate from Jenny's point of view although she is not occupying any accepted roles of Edwardian society exposing how society limits both men and women. Chris's cousin Jenny is one of the major characters forced to think of the ways how the war has transformed her life. Her contemplations begin with general reflections and culminate in personal struggle and despair. Jenny realizes that even the sky is assaulted and altered by the bitter reality of War: "*a searchlight turned all ways in the night like a sword brandished among the stars*" (1989:20). Jenny feels that her existence, her 'femininity,' has been rendered superfluous and contemptible by Chris's psychological response to the War. In her imagination, Jenny locates the domestic crisis of Baldry Court "*somewhere behind the [F]ront*" (1989: 41). Interestingly, Jenny is an outsider, even to the love story she narrates. Unlike most of the women of the wartime who took over their husbands' or sons' responsibilities at work or at home, Jenny is expected neither to work somewhere nor to worry for someone since she is not married. Without the prescribed roles of a concerned wife or dedicated mother, she is profoundly an ambiguous character in the story, incompatible with wartime patterns. It can be understood from her narration that what Jenny wants is to love and to be loved as a woman. Thus, we, as readers, can grasp that she has both physical and emotional attachment to Chris. This also makes her "I" narration reasonably subjective and problematic. Once Jenny says

> *"Through the feeling of doom that filled the room as tangibly as a scent I stretched out to the thought of Chris. In the deep daze of devotion which followed recollection of the*

fair down on his cheek, the skin burned brown to the rim of his grey eyes, the harsh and diffident masculinity of him, I found comfort in remembering that there was a physical gallantry about him which would still, even when the worst had happened, leap sometimes to the joy of life. Always, to the very end, when the sun shone on his face or his horse took his fences well, he would screw up his eyes and smile that little stiff-lipped smile" (1989:57).

In the quotation, it is obvious that the effect of war is intermingled with Jenny's attachment to Chris. Jenny's wish to fulfil her desire of a sincere love affair splits her psyche as well as her narration. At the beginning of the novel she says, "*we had made a fine place for Chris, our little part of the world that was, so far as surfaces could make it so, good enough for his amazing goodness*" (1989:4). As derived from Jenny's narration, she develops a sense of belonging in the domestic space of Baldry Court and her main trauma appears because Chris is unaware of Jenny's real feelings for him. Jenny grieves for, "*The sight of those things was no sort of joy, because [her] vision was solitary*", and she wants to end her "*desperation by leaping from a height"* flinging herself *"face downwards on the dead leaves below*" (1989:47). Jenny further confesses the discrepancy between what is and what she wants to be while describing the pain she feels: "*Through the blue twilight his white face had had a drowned look. I remembered it well, because my surprise that he passed me without seeing me had made me perceive for the first time that he had never seen me at all save in the most cursory fashion*" (1989:34). Jenny uses expressions like "our Chris", "whose passion of Chris was our point of horror", and "our common adoration" in which Jenny's attachment turns into possessiveness sometimes although he is married to Kitty. Jenny says that "like most English women of my time, I was wishing for the return of a soldier" (5). The thing is that this expression reminds us mainly of those wives and daughters waiting for the return of a soldier, not a cousin like Jenny. When this soldier is back with amnesia and only can remember a lower class woman Margaret, Jenny little by little resigns herself to living vicariously through her. When Margaret asks to see Chris, Jenny's frustration is unconcealed as she utters this sentence, "*The truth is that I was physically so jealous of Margaret that it was making me ill*" (1989:37). Thus, Jenny's attraction to Chris makes us speculate upon her reliability.

Jenny is out of the novel's primary love triangle of Chris, Kitty and Margaret, thus has no place within that frame, but she becomes enamored with the idea of romance itself. While Chris retreats to amnesia in order to escape the cultural and national expectations, Jenny finds refuge in their love affair. Jenny is fascinated by the connection between Chris, Kitty and Margaret, thus she narrates the story like a romance. Due to the War, Jenny is forced to explore her sexuality in a vicarious fashion through a lower-class woman whose exile from Baldry Court would have been assured at any other time. While Jenny believes romantic love can and should act as a remedy for war tribulations, West deconstructs this belief when she makes Jenny's romantic desires remain unfulfilled. Similar to Chris, Jenny ends up in participating in a social order that victimizes all the characters in the novel. Jenny is well aware that she has no place within the paradigms of either romance or war and Jenny's understanding of romance collapses by the novel's ending.

Early in the novel, Jenny notes that Chris was "*obliged to take over a business that was weighted by the needs of a mob of female relatives who were all useless either in the old way with antimacassars or in the new way with golf clubs*" (1989:5). The description of "useless" female relative is particularly interesting here since Jenny herself, as Chris's cousin who is not working, is among these "mob of female relations". Unable to distinguish herself from this "useless mobs", Jenny asserts that she, along with Kitty, is a worthy woman making a fine place for Chris in Baldry Court. Both Jenny and Kitty as upper class females are not supposed to work, so they are trying to achieve a sense of fulfilment. When Jenny affirms that she and Kitty "*had made happiness inevitable for him*" (1989:4) Jenny describes this act as a "*responsibility that gave [them] dignity, to compensate him for his lack of free adventure by arranging him a gracious life*" (1989:5). Jenny, then, believes Chris should be "compensated" by the women in his life for taking on responsibilities of masculinity, an idea that is particularly dominating the war years. West, in a way, manipulates the conventions of romantic fiction suggesting that women as well as men are regimented into inflexible gender roles. Jenny, like Chris, is unable to find an identity that will provide both happiness and social acceptability. As an unmarried upper class woman in Edwardian society Jenny cannot meet the social and cultural expectations, and, therefore, she cannot find her way across a metaphoric battleground. Yet, this also makes her a female who is not archetypal.

While Chris's status as both a victim of and a participant in war exposes how men suffer from the codes of the good soldier and expectations of the society, West also shows how women are limited by patriarchal wartime conventions that offer two acceptable roles to women, neither of which Jenny can fulfil as discussed before. Kitty, Chris's wife for ten years, as an upper-class woman who is protected by her husband, creates an ideal home space as a form of "compensation" for his heroism. According to Jenny, Kitty is the ideal woman managing coldly luxurious Baldry Court with her "*decorative genius*" (1989:36). Kitty's marriage provides her with a financial superiority and expensive elegance: "*She is the… owner of a luxury car and a great deal of jewelry. Kitty is all that a wife should be*" (1989:21-22). Jenny describes Kitty "*like a girl on a magazine cover one expected to find a large '15cents' attached somewhere to her person*" (1989:3). When Jenny sees Kitty in her dead son's room she thinks that Kitty is there to mourn, but instead, she discovers Kitty is there in order to dry her hair because it gets more sunlight. Although Jenny thinks that Kitty is there for more sunlight, most likely Kitty is there to cover her trauma of the loss. For Jenny, Kitty is one of the ideal examples of Edwardian femininity: she is "*sweet and obedient and alert*" (1989:20). But here it should be highlighted that although Jenny thinks that such women are "obscurely aware that it is their civilizing mission to flash the jewel of their beauty before all men", there are different layers of traumas dominating Kitty's life: the war, her husband's amnesia which makes him forget her, and the death of her son, Oliver. Kitty is a spirited woman holding all of the power at Baldry Court and her femininity is not equal to passivity or weakness as Jenny considers. On the evening of Chris's return, Kitty enters into the dining hall like "*a bride …With her lower lip thrust out*":

> *"As if considering a menu, she lowered her head and looked down on herself. She frowned to see that the high lights on the satin shone scarlet from the fire, that her flesh glowed like a rose, and she changed her seat for a high-backed chair beneath the furthest*

candle sconce. There were green curtains close by, and now the lights on her satin gown were green like cleft ice. She looked as cold as moonlight, as virginity, but precious; the falling candlelight struck her hair to bright, pure gold. So she waited for him" (1989:17).

It is obvious that like a warrior she prepares herself strategically with her choice of dress. She is well aware that the most meticulously constructed domestic home space does not assure happiness for its dwellers. She looks cold and tries to control others' manners. She is definitely crafty in social ordering being aware of her "civilizing mission" as well as power. On the surface, Kitty is a picture of Edwardian femininity; however, it becomes clear that Kitty is neither "sweet" nor "obedient". It is like she is acting on the stage and using her femininity as a performance. Thus, her gender identity is performative, not stable. Kitty stands for both the cause and effect of English civilization, luring men into their socially prescribed roles of amassing wealth and property which, in turn, allows women to continue their performance of femininity. This prescription of gender roles culminates in a war.

Kitty can be regarded as Chris's traumatized equivalent and this may imply that West's novel exposes trauma's diverse sources and records (Pulsifer 2013: 38). Kitty as a mother who lost her son is showing symptoms of trauma, but Chris's war trauma surpasses hers as patriarchal discourse respects war experiences more. Kitty's numbness as well as her strange attitudes like her habitual returns to the nursery can be regarded as symptoms of her mental struggle. When Chris is back from the trench, he cannot remember his wife, Kitty. Kitty, as the heroine of a war time tragedy, has to handle with different layers of trauma.

Not remembering Kitty, Chris watches "*her retreat into the shadows, as though she was a symbol of this new life by which he was baffled and oppressed*" (1989:16). Kitty insists that Chris is not suffering from trauma regarding his shell shock as a "*child who hadn't enjoyed a party as much as it thought it would*" (1989:21). Chris does not remember Kitty, and obviously this makes her utterly frustrated. When Chris recounts the loss of his memory, he depicts how a romantic evening with Margaret "dissolved" into a "hateful world" with "barbed wire entanglements" and "booming noise" (1989:66). The descriptions of war are terse and sensory, marked by brevity which is more powerful than overstatement. When Kitty learns Chris's amnesia and his newly discovered love for Margaret, Kitty responds, "*It shows there are bits of him we don't know*" (1989:17). Then she says "*By night I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of No Man's Land, starting back here because he trod upon a hand, not even looking there because of the awfulness of an unburied head, and not till my dream was packed full of horror did I see him pitch forward on his knees as he reached safety—if it was that*" (1989 :5). As for some critics while the Great War provided women with new experiences and opportunities in the work places, propelling many of them into jobs for the first time in the manufacturing industries or the nursing professions, upper class women like Kitty and Jenny watched the war and its destructions from a distance like watching a movie. But for Kitty who is having her own battle, it is very hard to endure the pain of Oliver and her husband's not remembering her.

Besides Kitty and Jenny, Margaret is also infected by Chris's amnesia and forced to re-evaluate her past and present. In contrast to Kitty and Jenny, Margaret is described as a woman

of lower class who is "*bad enough"* and *"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*" (1989:6-7). Early in the novel Jenny hates "*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*" (1989:9). When Kitty sees Margaret, maintaining her upper class position, she claims: "*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've read of such cases in the papers. You forget that if anything had happened to my husband the War Office would have told me*" (1989:9). After learning that Margaret is there to talk about Chris's amnesia, she says "*What is it I don't know about him?"* (1989:11). It is clear that Margaret's appearance makes Kitty think Chris could not have known such a woman who follows "last years' fashion". Then again, when Margaret uncovers issues of his character, Kitty angrily asks "*How do you know all of this*?" (1989:13).

In her narration, Jenny's attitude towards Margaret displays change. When Jenny goes to see Margaret in Wealdstone, in her moderate home, she perceives "*clearly that the ecstatic woman lifting her eyes and her hands to the benediction of love was Margaret as she existed in eternity; but this was Margaret as she existed in time, as the fifteen years between Monkey Island and this damp day in Ladysmith Road*" (1989:31); thus, she promises herself "*to bring her to him*" (1989:32) as "*nothing is too good for Chris*" (1989:31). What Jenny understands is that although Margaret is not as young as she was fifteen years ago, Chris "*loved her in this twilight, which obscured all the physical details which he adored*" (1989:25). Jenny develops a kind of understanding of a mutual love through Chris and Margaret since they are the "*only two real people in the world, Chris and this woman whose personality was sounding through her squalor like a beautiful voice singing in a darkened room*" (1989:31). She further describes Chris, when he was with Margaret, as "*a sleeping child, his hands unclenched and his head thrown back so that the bare throat showed defenselessly*" (1989:42). Margaret represents the past which connects him to life. It is clear that although Margaret and Chris loved each other sincerely and deeply, they had to take two different paths because of their social status. It is mainly because of their love, Margaret helps Chris and Chris remembers only Margaret. Chris's trauma makes Margaret remember her past and the pains she endured. In the pastoral setting where they meet, Chris is temporarily freed from the horrors of the War and his mandatory role within it as an adult male who should be brave. Chris -between Kitty and Margaret, his manly duties and his desires, body and soul- is like a threshold character who seeks the true meaning of his existence since

> "*when one is adult one must raise to one's lips the wine of the truth, heedless that it is not sweet like milk but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk for ever queer and small like a dwarf. Thirst for this sacrament had made Chris strike away the cup of lies about life that Kitty's white hands held to him, and turn to Margaret with this vast trustful gesture of his loss of memory*" (1989:57-58).

The Great War in Britain is regarded as the conflict between men who would uphold "*the moral virtues of heroism*" and men who would nourish the "*desire for self-preservation*" in the

face of warfare (Bergonzi 1965:11-12). In the novel Chris is the soldier of the story, yet Jenny, Kitty and Margaret, as well as their identity crises, are more foregrounded. As Eric Leed observes, the conditions of trench warfare often led to shell-shock or complete nervous collapse, because those conditions shattered "*distinctions that were central to orderly thought, communicable experience, and normal human relations*" (1979:21). Maybe because of this reason the novel is not narrated from his point of view, but from Jenny's perspective. Not Chris, but his amnesia symbolically dominates the plot and discloses other traumas in the other characters. West successfully portrays different levels of disturbances caused by the trauma of the war one of which is Chris's rejection of his wife to find a kind of internal unity in an unsafe world. Jenny at the beginning tells the reader that "*here we had made happiness inevitable for him*" (1989:6) since they created a "globe of ease". While describing Chris for the readers she also says "This house, this life with us, was the core of his heart". But, we grasp the idea that he is not contented with that neatly organized globe.

The life at Baldry Court is a domestic chain that prohibits Chris from pursuing a free life as a man of his intellectual and emotional capabilities. It can be claimed that adult Chris is not a participant in the creation of his own happiness, and because of this reason he reverts back to a time when he was in control of his life once the trauma of war causes amnesia in him. Jenny, while narrating their childhood adventure describes Chris as a boy fond of adventure. Jenny states, "*It was his hopeless hope that some time he would have an experience that would act on his life like alchemy, turning to gold all the dark metals of events, and from that revelation he would go on his way rich with an inextinguishable joy*" (1989:6). This description, so obviously, reflects the lofty aspirations of Chris buried in his past. She confesses that "*I had lain on us, as the responsibility that gave us dignity, to compensate him for his lack of free adventure by arranging him a gracious life. But now, just because our performance had been so brilliantly adequate, how dreary was the empty stage*" (1989:4). We are introduced to a man who is torn between his desire for love and adventure, and his domestic responsibilities; in other words, between his body and soul. As Jenny notes, "If the soul has to stay in his coffin till the lead is struck asunder, in its captivity it speaks with such a voice" (1989:17). Chris's emotional attachment to Margaret might highlight the barrenness of life at Baldry Court, thus symbolically he remembers Monkey Island, an idyllic place which is away from the destruction of the war and which provides a healing power for Chris. It is a place where "*The whole world seemed melting into light. Cumulus-clouds floated very high, like lumps of white light, against a deep, glowing sky, and dropped dazzling reflections on the beaming Thames. The trees moved not like timber, shocked by wind, but floatingly, like weeds at the bottom of a well of sunshine*" (1989:25).

West explores "*Chris's process of working through trauma and giving testimony, a process that simultaneously makes possible and is made possible by the relationship with Margaret*" (Pividori 2010: 97). Chris's amnesia is "a symbol of the pastness of the pre-war past"; it is a narrative of "paradise regained" and lost, when Baldry is "cured" and must return to Flanders, after acknowledging the ongoing reality of his apparently sterile marriage (Hynes1990:212). Due to this conflict, his amnesia takes him back to the times when he was happy and following his desires as a young man. When he returns as a shell-shocked soldier:

> *the blankness of those eyes which saw [Jenny] only as a disregarded playmate and Kitty not at all saves as a stranger who had somehow become a decorative presence in his home and the orderer of his meals he let us know completely where we were.… [Jenny] felt, indeed, a cold intellectual pride in his refusal to remember his prosperous maturity and his determined dwelling in the time of his first love, for it showed him so much saner than the rest of us, who take life as it comes, loaded with the inessential and the irritating. [Jenny] was even willing to admit that this choice of what was to him reality out of all the appearances so copiously presented by the world, this adroit recovery of the dropped pearl of beauty, was the act of genius I had always expect from him. But that did not make less agonizing this exclusion from his life* (1989:41).

In the story Margaret represents "*not only the soldier's desire to love and be loved but also his deepest search for meaning and purpose"* in a moment of crisis (Pividori 2010: 98). In the final moments, after Margaret jars Chris back into reality by reminding him of Oliver's death, Chris returns to his house "every inch a soldier" (1989:90). This is highly metaphoric: his body returns to home space, the familial responsibilities and national expectations, but his soul remains in a different place and time. It is ironic that "*Chris remains blissfully unaware of his amnesia while his wife, cousin, and former lover negotiate his memory loss and attempt to restore the perceived security his masculinity offers*" (Pulsifer 2013:37). The word 'return' in the novel has two significant meanings: One is Chris's return from the battlefield as a British soldier, the other one is his psychological return from his amnesia. It is clear that his mental restoration means his restoration back to bitter realities of his life and the Great War.

Conclusion

In *The Return of the Soldier*, West relates traumas of war to gender roles which victimize both men and women. Although the part after Chris's return from the battlefront dominates the narration and the novel seemingly revolves around the traditional love triangle, this love story and its plot are complicated by the different levels of personal traumas of the main characters. At the end of Jenny's narration Chris is eventually 'cured' and is, thereby, restored back into the social order, to fulfil his role as an upper-class gentleman and as a brave soldier dutifully. While Chris's status as both a victim of and a participant in war exposes how men suffer from the archetype of the 'good soldier', West also shows how women are limited by patriarchal wartime conventions that offer acceptable but limited roles to women. Jenny, Kitty, and Margaret become aware of the price of devotion to social conventions related to typical gender norms, yet none of them is able to escape totally from those very roles which will continue to define their relationships with their society and nation. None of the characters can act in accordance with their desires since they are forced to follow the codes of acceptable feminine or masculine traits, and, therefore, they cannot find their way across a figurative battleground.

Ethical Statement

According to the author's statement; scientific, ethical, and quotation rules were followed in the writing process of the study named "Trauma of War in Rebecca West's *The Return of The Soldier*"; according to ULAKBİM TRDizin criteria, there was no need for data collection in the study requiring ethics committee approval.

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