



A Train of Powder

Rebecca West

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Like most all of Rebecca West's reportage, *A Train of Powder* approaches great literature. Written between 1946 and 1954, these accounts of four controversial trials explore the nature of crime and punishment, innocence and guilt, retribution and forgiveness. The centerpiece of the book is "Greenhouse with Cyclamens," a three-part essay on the Nuremberg trials written with precision, clarity, and daring insight. She also reports on two particularly brutal murder trials ? one for a lynching in North Carolina, the other for a "torso murder" in England ? and the espionage trial of a British telegrapher. Throughout, the question of guilt inspires Ms. West to feats of psychological detection wherein unerring craftsmanship and a powerful narrative sense combine to a high purpose ? the pursuit of truth. "An astonishing book.... As compelling as Court TV but without the frisson of voyeurism (and with the compensatory satisfactions of West's breathtakingly lucid prose style), these elegant narratives remind us of the preciousness and fragility of our right to trial by jury."?Francine Prose. "It is her unique magic to combine impressionism and precision, as if Monet and Ingres could somehow be fused. Time and again a passage begins as a sort of iridescent cloud, and culminates in a diamond point."?Telford Taylor, *Saturday Review*. "Rebecca West...has raised journalism to a high art, breathing into it a depth, a poetry, a subtlety, and an understanding and compassion for human beings and their endless follies and tragedies that give it a legitimate place in contemporary literature."?William L. Shirer.

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