

Powys Notes

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MARIUS BUNING

my wine is as strong as death and as sweet as love
T.F. POWYS
all life is pretence, but never death

A MODERN ALLEGORIST

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JOHN A. BREBNER

WOLF SOLENT AND BLACK LIST, SECTION H: AN ENLIGHTENMENT

Intriguingly, in the early pages of The Weight of the World, Peter Handke remarks:

The feeling that almost everything I have seen or heard up to now loses its original form the moment it enters into me, that it can no longer be described in words or represented in images, but is instantly metamorphosed into something quite formless; as though the effort of my writing were needed to change the innumerable formless pupae inside me into something essentially different. Thus, writing would be an awakening of thousands of unformed pupate experiences to new forms, which, however, through my feeling, would still retain a connection with the original experiences--with those authentic, real, but meaningless things, which would thus be the mythological images of my consciousness and my existence; the thought that now arises of all the innumerable,

terrifyingly formless pupate hybrids within me, neither thing nor image, but halfway between--and of the work that lies ahead of me to fixate in speech and idea these hybrids. . . and to fashion them into something radiantly new, in which, however, one senses the old, the original experience, as one senses the caterpillar in the butterfly!¹

Should we be surprised when, a short while later, Handke's narrator mentions that he is reading Wolf Solent?

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An introduction to the participants in our inquiry:

[Francis Stuart] looms like a Dostoyevskian figure: married to Maud Gonne's lazy, beautiful daughter; IRA gunrunner and prisoner in the Civil War; living with whores in Paris; farming; roaming Europe and writing novels. Gambler, rebel, mystic, delinquent--in 1940 he arrives in Hitler's Germany to join the black list of the guilty and the damned. His journey has taken him beyond the moral pale at last, to find himself "alone and free, passionately involved in my own living fiction."²

John Cowper Powys seems an unlikely match for the man just described. The late Jean Genet might seem a more appropriate comparison. We remember Powys as a man who felt uncomfortable if the top button of his shirt were not done up snug; who in spite of years on the lecture circuit always seemed more at home in Thomas Hardy's Dorset or the bardic fastnesses of North Wales.

Differences between the lives of the two men are apparent; so are those between the two novels I have chosen to discuss. But should not differences exist? And if so, do not differences affirm similarities? (My own formless pupate hybrids struggle for definition).

Stuart describes Black List: Section H as "an imaginative fiction in which only real people appear and under their actual names where possible." The narrative structures the central character's development from his adolescence in Ireland to his imprisonment more than forty years later in an Allied detention camp after the Second World War. The letter "H" is used as the character's appellation. Many of the circumstances in H's life mirror Stuart's own--his marriage to Iseult Gonne, his association with Yeats and Irish writers, his travels throughout Europe, the war years spent in Nazi Germany lecturing and broadcasting. But this book, as we shall see, is much more than a thinly disguised autobiography.

Let us now reacquaint ourselves with Wolf Solent. Many of us have lived with this novel for quite some time. In fact, it has probably received more attention because of its apparent accessibility than any of J.C.Powys's other work. Wolf, the protagonist, has been frequently identified in thought and appearance with his creator, as H has been with Stuart. I, for one, took exception to this attitude in The Demon Within where, with callow exuberance, I was at pains to emphasize the distance between John Cowper the author and Wolf the character. However, I no longer believe that such a separation is either justifiable or even desirable. There are other ways of approaching JCP as there are of Francis Stuart, approaches which deliberately blur the distinction between author and work without indulging in shapeless generalizations.

Let us return to Peter Handke's remark about sensing "the caterpillar in the butterfly." Wolf Solent's journeys take him to King's Barton to work as Squire Urquhart's "literary assistant." Throughout the novel, Wolf is preoccupied with writing his "libidinous" history of Dorset. (C.A.Coates's use of the word "pornographic" as a description of Wolf's activity strikes me as unhelpful at best, at worst misleading). As much as anything else, this

writing precipitates the various crises in his life. Powys carefully describes Wolf's attitude toward his work:

He had to take the spiteful commentaries and floating fragments of wicked gossip gathered together by his employer, and translate them into a style that had at least some beauty of its own. This style had been his own contribution to the book; and though it had been evoked under external pressure, and in a sense had been a tour de force, it was in its essence the expression of Wolf's own soul--the only purely aesthetic expression that Destiny had ever permitted to his deeper nature.

The further he advanced with his book the more interested he became in this aspect of it. He spent hours revising the earlier chapters, written before this style of his had established itself; and he came to value these elaborate pages as things that were precious in themselves--precious independently of whether or not they were ever printed.

Here is the pupate hybrid--"in its essence the expression of Wolf's own soul"--which he hopes to fashion into something precious. Then he has une crise de conscience and feels "a sense of nausea with regard to these lewd preciosities." Nevertheless, much later and apart from the economic and familial pressures forcing him to complete the work, he reaffirms his involvement with the project.

Writing day after day from seven o'clock to ten o'clock, Wolf had come to hit upon a style of chronicling shameful events and disconcerting episodes that cost him less and less effort as the weeks advanced. What really gave him impetus was a trick he discovered of diffusing his own resentment against the Power behind the universe into his commentaries upon these human aberrations unearthed by his employer! The more disgust he felt for his task, the more saturnine his style became and the faster he wrote! Some of his sentences, when he revised them in cold blood, struck him as possessing quite a Swift-like malignity. He astonished himself by certain misanthropic outbursts. His habitual optimism seemed to fall away at such times, and a ferocious contempt for both men and women lay revealed, like a sullen, evil-looking, drained-out pond!

It was a surprise to him to find that this business of writing 'immoral history' lent itself as well as it did to his natural method of expression. (453)

We might well ask ourselves: Has the butterfly become a moth? What is the nature of this "ferocious contempt for both men and women," the "malignity," the "misanthropic outbursts"? Why does this seemingly repulsive material suit Wolf's "natural method of expression"?

Let us for a moment shift our emphasis to the subjects which John Cowper Powys examines in Wolf Solent. Doesn't he touch upon lust, adultery, incest, homosexuality, necrophilia, lesbianism, pederasty, and illegitimacy? Isn't Wolf's subject matter in fact Powys's? Isn't Wolf's dilemma as a writer precisely Powys's?

The writer observes--experiences if you will--"those authentic, real but meaningless things," the very internalization of which he must shape into new expression. The nature of that expression co-exists with the pupate hybrids within the writer. And in Powys that expression is essentially malignant and

misanthropic.

The pervasive image of malignity in the novel is the face on the Waterloo steps:

It was just the face of a man, of a mortal man, against whom Providence had grown as malignant as a mad dog. And the woe upon the face was of such a character that Wolf knew at once that no conceivable readjustments or ameliorative revolutions could ever atone for it--could ever make up for the simple irremediable fact that it had been as it had been! (3)

That image with its attendant cluster--the hunted look in the eyes of Darnley Otter, in those of Squire Urquhart, of Tilly-Valley, of Stalbridge, and of Malakite among others--pervades Wolf's thought and Powys's imagination: it is the malignancy at the core of Wolf Solent. That is the festering sore which Wolf tries to submerge and heal in his "mythology," his "life-illusion"--but precisely because it is myth and illusion the technique cannot eradicate his fundamental perception. "He hid, deep down in his being, a contempt that was actually malicious in its pride for all the phenomena of worldly success." (8)

That contempt brings us finally to Black List: Section H, for it was that phrase of Powys's which suggested to me the link between the two books and the two writers. In Black List, Stuart details his experiences as an Irish revolutionary, as a man-about-Europe, as an Irishman living in Germany during World War II but, ultimately, he interprets these events in the light of the underlying thrust of the novel: an exploration of the meaning and process of writing.

As an adolescent H expresses the opinion that "Dishonour is what becomes a poet, not titles or acclaim." (20) He then proceeds to live in ways which guarantee dishonour. Interestingly, he has a degenerate father who died an alcoholic in a mental hospital and whose ghost haunts H's imagination throughout the novel in much the same way as old Truepenny's does Wolf. (There are other similarities of plot and observation shared by the two novels, but, these lie beyond the scope of this paper.)

H courts dishonour indiscriminately.

He hardly distinguished revolutionary acts from those committed by criminals as long as the result was like that of a stone dropped into a mill pond. He imagined the ripples of unease that must disturb the complacency, which was what he distrusted most, that stagnated in the minds of many people, especially those held in high esteem in their own closed circles. (22)

The "stone dropped into a mill pond" which will disturb the status quo reminds us of Wolf's early musings about the "great stone of real reality . . . hard, brutal, material stones" which would "break up this mirror of half-reality" (9) which seemed to separate his inner and outer worlds. The impulse here is anarchic as it is throughout Black List and Wolf Solent, the emphasis on the individual rather than the societal; narcissistic, finally nihilistic.

Counterbalancing the intensity inherent in each author's point of view is self-deprecation often expressed as humour, albeit bizarre at times. This is more obvious in Stuart's novel although it is present as a subtle current throughout Powys's. Here we might consider H's activities as an IRA gunrunner. Sent to France to pick up small arms, his thoughts run to more personal procurements. "The idea of [purchasing] French letters now took possession of him and they seemed at least as important as the guns." (69) He buys "a discreet little packet"--they were of course illegal in Ireland at

that time--and boards the boat for home, the guns strapped to his waist under shirt and trousers. He passes Irish Customs without difficulty and locks himself in his cabin.

He then took out the envelope and examined one of the pale, rolled, rubber rings webbed over with a semitransparent membrane.

It was difficult to adjust, he got it contrari-wise, trying to roll it in the wrong direction. But once in place he felt it was part of a symbolic regalia, like judge's wig, or general's baton, whose donning gave him authority. (69)

The episode is typical of the understatement prevalent throughout Black List and serves as a healthy antidote to the bombast quoted by publishers on book covers.

However whimsical H's political behaviour may be, Stuart himself is uncompromising about his character's artistic posture.

There had to be an extreme flexibility of spirit and avoidance of all moralizing in order to associate with the losers at any given moment, who, for the poet, were the only suitable companions. This meant never holding to any political, social, or moral belief, because that would put him on the right or justified side where he would be cut off from the true sources of his inspiration. (42)

Furthermore we are informed: "His calling isolates the artist, as does his crime the criminal." (147)

As Powys chose the face on the Waterloo steps to depict the malignancy of Providence, Stuart chooses an image of two Irish girls chained to a fence in Dublin, "a notice pinned to them with the word 'Traitors' scrawled on it."

The girls tied to the railings symbolized for H the poet who is exposed and condemned for his refusal to endorse the closed judgements and accept the categorical divisions into right and wrong that prevailed. If he survived the ordeal there would flow from the depths of his isolation fresh imaginative streams to melt the surrounding freeze-up. (41)

The image of the girls reoccurs frequently to H as his life progresses, an especially lurid and scatological example cropping up in a novel that H is writing. (179-180) Thus, we find the same "book-within-a-book," mirror-effect which Powys used in Wolf Solent. In both cases we are witnessing a form of authorial manipulation (unconscious I believe) which forces the character to become a victim to his own creator. When Wolf accepts payment for his History and H accepts an offer to broadcast for the Nazis, each man's reaction is a paradox of elation and anguish. First, Wolf's thoughts:

And then, as he stared at Mr. Urquhart, it became clear to him in a flash of cruel illumination that these two things--to-day's bargain with the Squire and to-morrow's visit to Christie--would be the end of his peace of mind. To these two things had he been brought at last. This was the issue; this was the climax of the mounting wave of his life in Dorset. He had to outrage now--and it was too late to retreat--the very core of his nature! (405-406)

And here is H's response:

In agreeing, H was turning from the busy street to slink with thieves and petty criminals down dim alleys, leaving the lawful company to which he'd belonged to become, in its eyes, a traitor. . . .

The deed was done. H's first reaction: relief at in the end it being so easy to take this step outside the moral Pale.

The advantage he had over the ordinary criminal was that in the prevailing conditions it was possible to act in a way that would evoke in his judges the same condemnation as the kind of peacetime crime of which he was incapable. (258)

The ending (and I use the word in all deference to the great conundrum of "closure")--the ending of each novel is strikingly similar. H is in a solitary prison cell but has just had a glimpse of "pure, pale" mountain peaks "floating high above the distant horizon."

Although he was still far from coming to understand the necessity for what had happened to them, he did begin to see the silence that he had entered as the deep divide between the past and what was to come. Whatever it was that was at the other end there was no way of telling. It might be a howl of final despair or the profound silence might be broken by certain words that he didn't yet know how to listen for. (351)

Wolf too is alone and reflects on his situation:

The Cause up there could certainly at any minute make him howl like a mad dog. It could make him dance and skip and eat dung. Well, until it did that, he was going to endure . . . follow his 'road,' through the inkstains, and endure! (613-614)

The writers' perceptions, no longer in their original form, have now become in their new articulation "the mythological images" of their consciousness and existence, to paraphrase Handke. Both Powys and Stuart are extremely aware of perception, sensation, expression; and, most importantly, they attempt to record the process. For instance, this passage from Stuart:

There were two or three library books on the big desk, a glass-stoppered ink bottle standing on the base of its own shadow, a handful of brassy Pfennige, mark and two-mark pieces with a dim silver sheen in a china bowl, and these he saw not as usual submerged in the present flowing over them, but suddenly exposed and made unique by a shift in the tide of time. He was momentarily aware of them no longer as part of a Berlin room on a wartime night but as they'd always appear in the light of his backward vision. (287)

Each author's transformational consciousness allows him to confront and articulate the embryonic stirrings of the "terrifyingly formless pupate hybrids" within himself. There is no separation between author and character in the sense of fictive act. What we discover in Wolf Solent and Black List is not a solution, not a progression or development of the character of Wolf or H, but an exploration of the complexity of the creative consciousness. Wolf Solent's final misanthropies dovetail with Black List's disenfranchised "into something radiantly new, in which, however, one senses the old, the original experience, as one senses the the caterpillar in the butterfly!"

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critic" (p. 110). Powys, then, old-fashioned as he may appear in some ways, also shows exactly the self-reflexiveness characteristic of the post-modernist novel. And for each of the two works, Buning reminds us, there is an appropriate critical term: "comparing Unclay with Mr. Weston's Good Wine. . .we notice how in the former the emphasis is on the 'readerly' and in the latter on the 'writerly' aspect of literature" (p.123). However, Buning's judicious use of recent critical theory is one of the very real strengths of his book; not the least because he writes clearly, and without an excess of critical jargon. This restraint is particularly welcome, given the terminological burden of Fletcher's theoretical framework.

Buning's professed interest in intertextuality leads him to pay close attention to the many literary allusions in both novels--an aspect of Powys's style which has not always drawn critical praise. Buning has done his home-work well, and assembles a comprehensive list of allusions in two appendices. On the evidence there available, Unclay would seem to be by far the richer text, with almost twice as many identified references and allusions as Mr. Weston's Good Wine [61 to 35 for the numerically minded].

It is probably no surprise to learn that nearly half the references in Unclay are to one or other novel of Jane Austen, "the most quoted author in Powys's oeuvre." Of course, Jane (as Powys is wont to call her familiarly) has a special role in Unclay; she is almost a character. She is, for example, read into the book, so to speak, by Mr. Hayhoe, the eccentric clergyman, and disciple of Jane, who asserts that Northanger Abbey "would do nearly as well [to quote from]" as the Bible. Indeed, some incidents might incline us to believe that the books of Jane Austen are distinctly superior to the books of the Bible, at least as guides to conduct. For it is after Mr. Hayhoe has been reading the book of Joshua to Daisy Huddy that she hangs a scarlet thread outside her bedroom window. Mr. Hayhoe explains to his wife that "I put the Bible into my pocket instead of Persuasion." (p. 46)--a nice irony! In fact, Daisy and Winnie Huddy are also influenced by their exposure to Jane Austen, or rather to her characters and settings; Daisy claims that John Death's clothes were given him by Lady Catherine de Bourgh [of Pride and Prejudice] (p. 303) and Winnie that Lord Bullman "bain't nothing to Squire Knightley" [of Emma] (p.341). Curiously, Buning is rather less persuasive about the significance of all these references to Jane Austen than he is about the other literary allusions. He argues that the "quasi-religious function attributed to her work" is "Powysian irony directed at the pious clergy and equally at the solemnly possessive reader of her novels" (p. 176) and that both authors "investigate. . .the nature of human happiness and the part played by fate" (p. 123). But are these reasons sufficient to justify the very considerable presence of Jane Austen in the novel? I think not. Buning might have done more with the paradoxical reversal implicit in the elevation of the work of an earthly writer over that of God, especially when the Bible remains an important ironic 'pre-text.' Moreover, Northanger Abbey, the first of Jane's books read, is arguably a kind of structural model for Powys. In it, a young woman confuses the fictive with the real world, just as the Huddy sisters do; the worth of characters is to no little degree a function of whether they like reading and literature (Henry Tilney) or not (John Thorpe); and the author/narrator systematically uses literary allusion and even intrudes to discuss the Novel, rather as Powys himself does in Mr. Weston's Good Wine and Unclay.

On the other hand, Buning is very convincing in arguing that the other literary allusions are "thematically related to the ambivalent meanings inherent in the central symbol of the parchment" and that "all references and allusions are concerned with love and death as the two realities of life." From Blake, Bunyan, Frazer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, he demonstrates, we come

to know that "Love is a burden, and, above all, cruel" and from Keats, Nietzsche and Shakespeare that "death is desirable" (p. 124).

Some important stylistic distinctions emerge from Buning's analysis of the "patterns of symbolic action." Perhaps the most interesting is the fact that present tense exposition usually precedes past tense narration, and that the expository passages are typically located at the beginnings of chapters, thereby setting the narrative tone of the chapter. No fewer than twenty of the fifty-four chapters of Unclay open with a reflective "authorial comment"; whereas only four chapters of Mr. Weston's Good Wine (5, 12, 24, 25) begin in like manner. Buning concludes that "this reflective tendency. . . is one of the reasons why we may call Unclay more allegorical than its companion novel" (pp. 222-3). He is clearly hesitant to claim that Unclay is the superior work, but one has the impression that he believes it is. In any case, he does not accept Cavaliero's judgement that Unclay is "far from being [Powys's] best book," and musters some cogent arguments to support his case.

We are indebted to Buning, then, in a number of ways. He has tackled a difficult subject, allegory, and shown us how it simply cannot be ignored in Powys's mature work, if we are to venture beyond the shallows of paraphrase and appreciation and into the deep waters of serious criticism. He has shown courage in confining his attention to two novels, but the results justify his decision; for he has given us a rich, dense, though always readable work. And he has also proven that recent critical theories can illuminate the work of a writer often deemed perversely old-fashioned. By so doing, of course, he increases the chances that Powys may be read in future generations by more than a small band of the faithful.

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A. THOMAS SOUTHWICK

VN and JCP: A REVIEW

Andrew Field, VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Crown Publishers, 1986. 417 pp., \$19.95.

To Vladimir Nabokov, art was a grand game, besides the formal challenges of which the maker's beliefs, experiences, and feelings were of little significance. Nabokov viewed the novels that he taught in his comparative literature course at Cornell with a paramount interest in their technical brilliance, and he appeared to approach his own writing in the same spirit: as a set of formal and stylistic problems to be solved ingeniously. The main point of Andrew Field's study is to show, on the contrary, that Nabokov's life was closely interwoven with his fiction. The characteristic theme and tone of Nabokov's novels have their source in the author's observation of his central emotional need.

VN is the story of a resilient survivor who, through genius and shrewdness, rose to prominence both among the emigre Russians of the twenties and thirties in Europe and in the post-war United States. Field contends, however, that Nabokov remained psychologically a child who had lost everything--the comfort and affection of his family life in Russia first of all, and then his beloved father, who was murdered before Vladimir's eyes in Berlin in 1922 by mistaken counter-revolutionary assassins. Nabokov's response to these losses, in

Field's account, was that of the narcissist, for whom there is no entity in the world but projections of his own deep sense of injury and longing. The consequence of narcissism for the artist is that, as in the myth of Narcissus, he longs to see the double who is his missing half. However, also as in the myth, for the narcissist to see his true double would be for him to die, by annihilating the state of longing that makes up the world for him. The artist's role, then, is to create consciously distorted images of himself and of his loss. In Nabokov's fiction at its greatest, such figures as Professor Pnin, Humbert, and King Charles of Xembla are grotesque and pathetic reflections who seem to provoke their maker to recognition and sympathy, but also to ridicule and laughter.

Field upholds his interpretation of the relationship between Nabokov's life and work in two ways. First, he aims to show the fittingness of his view of Nabokov's mind by stating it in terms that accord with Nabokov's own understanding of psychology and of himself. Secondly, Field has researched the background and events of Nabokov's life in order to trace their echoes in his fiction.

According to Field, the psychological theorist in whom Nabokov felt most interest was Havelock Ellis. Ellis's case studies were apparently available to Nabokov from youth on, and Nabokov seems to have referred to Ellis's writings throughout his life. Field takes his notion of the narcissist from Ellis and is able to find evidence in Nabokov's writings that he identified himself with Narcissus. That Field does not make use of Freudian psychology is in keeping with Nabokov's repudiations of Freudianism throughout his career. Particularly, Nabokov rejected the idea of the unconscious as Freud defined it. What Field portrays as Nabokov's narcissism is, accordingly, a consciously held need that finds its expression in his art, but not in the unconscious patterns of his life.

Its relationship to his novels aside, Nabokov's life was a wonder. While twentieth century history twice turned him into an exile, Nabokov's personal good fortune was rare. Born into an aristocratic, politically progressive family, he left Russia forever at twenty, following the Bolshevik revolution. He completed studies at Cambridge and then became the leading young writer in the emigré literary scene situated mainly in Berlin and, after 1933, in Paris. By 1940, that life had ended. With the emigré audience much less vital and cohesive than in the years when return to Russia seemed possible, and with France about to fall to the Nazis, Nabokov left for the U.S., resolved to be a writer in English. By the mid-1950's he had established himself as a noteworthy American writer. Then the notoriety and success of *Lolita* made Nabokov a famous and wealthy man, able to leave university teaching and retire to Switzerland, where in the years before his death in 1977, he wrote several new books and translated his earlier Russian work into English.

There is much that is fascinating in Field's telling of this story: descriptions of a first-rate modern education in Czarist Russia, of the tumultuous emigré literary circles, of American literary and academic politics in the era of Edmund Wilson and Joseph McCarthy. And Nabokov is such a rich character, with his love affairs and his long and close marriage, his butterfly collecting and heroic soccer playing, his quarrels and charm.

It is a tribute to Field's directness and organization that he can present a psychological view of Nabokov, the narrative of his life, and discussions of Nabokov's books all in a little over 400 pages, including notes. (Since this is Field's fourth book on Nabokov, his conciseness may owe something to familiarity and practice.) In constructing the events of Nabokov's life, Field is diligent, enterprising, and imaginative, particularly where he has secured statements by Nabokov and others and presented them with a full sense

of how the witness's interest or distance makes his testimony problematic--caution that appears especially useful in dealing with Nabokov's interviews and autobiographical writing, where the personal or artistic impression the author intended counted more to him than the facts. In establishing the record Field is able to discover the source of events, names, and personal relationships in Nabokov's fiction. He shows how, in these books, the lost world of Russia and the Nabokov family is often present.

There is a moment in Nabokov's best book, Pale Fire, that may put the reader in mind of John Cowper Powys and his association with the exiles and lost worlds in Nabokov's fiction. Charles Kinbote's commentary on the poem "Pale Fire" turns, as it often does, to the story of King Charles, the deposed ruler of Xembla.

Line 691: the attack

John Shade's heart attack (Oct. 17, 1958) practically coincided with the disguised king's arrival in America where he descended by parachute from a chartered plane piloted by Colonel Montacute, in a field of hay-feverish, rank-flowering weeds, near Baltimore whose oriole is not an oriole. . . . While Kingsley, the British chauffeur, an old and absolutely faithful retainer, was doing his best to cram the bulky and ill-folded parachute into the boot, I relaxed on a shooting stick he had supplied me with, sipping a delightful Scotch and water from the car bar and glancing (amid an ovation of crickets and that vortex of yellow and maroon butterflies that so pleased Chateaubriand on his arrival in America) at an article in The New York Times in which Sylvia had vigorously and messily marked in red pencil a communication from New Wye which told of the "distinguished poet's" hospitalization.

This passage's verbal playfulness, loose-limbed long sentences, and easily worn knowledge of literature and nature all remind me of the narrative style of John Cowper Powys. The name "Montacute" may not have been consciously borrowed from John Cowper's Autobiography (Montacute was of course, the much-loved home of Powys's youth). On the other hand, Nabokov was such a magpie and riddler in his fiction that the name might be an allusion to Powys, whose work Nabokov could have discovered during his years in Berlin at a time when there was an interest in Powys and, according to Field, Nabokov kept up with German literary fashions.

Putting aside the question of whether Powys could have influenced Nabokov in some way (the kind of question that Field often considers in his discussions of Nabokov's books), I am struck by a kinship between them that at first might seem unlikely. To the apparent unconcern of John Cowper with matters of art and form, his willingness to use fiction as the vehicle for his views on public issues and the conduct of life, and his appreciation of the greatness of Dostoevsky's novels, Nabokov's practices and beliefs are fiercely in contrast. On the other hand, a similar thrust underlies both their achievements. In both there is attention to the outcast and his memories of a lost home. In Powys's Autobiography, for instance, with which Pale Fire has affinity, John Cowper's exile is eventually, like King Charles's, to America. Well before the point, though, it is clear that he is an exile from a world of imaginative potency, his own kingdom of Xembla. Furthermore, in both writers, the route to a lost world is often implicitly or overtly erotic, disclosing a world different from that conventionally experienced, yet contained within it.

In their drive to reveal a hidden dimension of reality both Powys and

Nabokov are heirs of the romantic poets. Indeed both men were published first as poets, and the poetry of their youth is squarely in the romantic tradition. The poem "Pale Fire," with its evocation of Wordsworthian moments of vision, is a later expression of this inheritance in Nabokov, as the Autobiography is Powys's mature play on romantic themes.

However the major achievements of both men are in the novel. It is their innovations that distinguish them. In Nabokov these include adopting, in contrast to the Wordsworthian voice of sincerity, the obsessed and doubtfully reliable narration of a Kinbote. Powys's move is in contrast, formally: opening up the point-of-view in his fiction to include wildly different visionary moments of a variety of characters. In the works of both Nabokov and Powys the characteristic effect is comic and ironic, undercutting the sublimity of what Keats called the "egotistical sublime" and emphasizing the absurdity as well as the grandeur of the visionary's ecstatic moments. As heirs of romanticism, Nabokov and Powys evoke not only the splendors but also the laughter and instability that are potential in their legacy.

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DENIS LANE

BRIEF REVIEW

Jeremy Hooker, The Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970-1981 (Manchester and New York: Carcanet Press, 1983). 197 pp. \$21.00. [Carcanet, the publishers of JCP's Three Fantasies, have a new U.S. address: 198 Sixth Avenue, New York, NY 10013].

Jeremy Hooker is well known to Powysians for his John Cowper Powys (UWP, 1973) in the Writers of Wales series, for his comparative study, John Cowper Powys and David Jones (Enitharmon, 1979), and as a poet of considerable standing. His latest prose work, an essay collection entitled the Poetry of Place, was first published in the U.K. in 1983, but is now available in the U.S. and Canada. Aficionados of the Powyses will find in this collection two essays of particular interest: one, "T.F. Powys: The Bass Note," has already appeared in The Powys Review and may therefore be familiar to readers; the other, "John Cowper Powys: Welsh Ambassador," though written in 1972, is new to me and regretfully so for it is perhaps one of the best introductory views of Powys yet presented. While disappointingly brief, the essay is nevertheless useful in tracing the ancient Welsh tradition as a central pillar of support in JCP's imagination and in clarifying its influence upon a writer whom Hooker calls "a great regenerative artist; [who] renews contact with sources of energy. . . to which the bias of modern civilization is hostile." Elsewhere in the book, Hooker ranges widely over the work of various contemporary writers in the British Isles--Seamus Heaney, the late John Riley, Philip Pacey--and closes with an extraordinary and powerful "Autobiographical Essay" that examines (as with his discussion of JCP) his own imaginative relationship, as an Englishman, with the literature and cultural identity of Wales, where he lived and taught for many years. It is a fascinating collection.

EDITOR'S NOTES

The Powys Society of North America presents its THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE at Hofstra University, Hempstead, Long Island, New York, from June 5 to June 7, 1987. A full program of events is being offered, including an opening presentation by H. W. Fawcner, author of The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys; two additional sessions on John Cowper Powys; a Saturday evening session featuring James Carley (author of a soon to be published history of the city of Glastonbury), and Peter Powys Grey (who will talk on the long friendship of JCP and Theodore Dreiser); and a full conference session (perhaps the first-ever of its kind) on the work of T. F. Powys. This latter event will include a paper by Marius Buning, author of the recently published T.F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist. In addition, Hofstra University Libraries will have on display material from their Powys manuscript collection.

All those interested in the Powyses are invited to join us at this third annual POWYSFEST. Reservations are still available and may be made by calling A. Thomas Southwick [718/768-6621], or Denis Lane [914/238-3533], or by sending the Conference Reservations form to A. Thomas Southwick, 391 Second Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

The Vernon Young Reviews. Since the Editor of The American Scholar is said to have received "numerous, sharp replies" in response to the review by Vernon Young of Wolf Solent and Weymouth Sands (Spring, 1986), it was puzzling why none of these replies was ever published. PSNA member REUTH AMBRE pursued the issue and was sent the following by Jean Stipicevic of The American Scholar: "Unfortunately, because of space limitations, Paul Roberts's letter did not appear in our Autumn 1986 issue. Because Vernon Young died in August, we have decided not to run any letters concerning his review of the Powys books in our future issues. . . I'm sorry to disappoint you."

ALYSE GREGORY AUTOGRAPH LETTERS. The following item appears in Catalogue 138 of Eric and Joan Stevens, Antiquarian Booksellers, 74 Fortune Green Road, London NW6 1DS: "Item 362. Alyse Gregory Letters. A Collection of 137 Items: Letters and postcards amounting to some 340 sides of hand written material dating from 1944-1967, from Alyse Gregory, political campaigner, women's suffragist, one time editor of The Dial, novelist, essayist and wife of Llewelyn Powys. . . The letters reveal much about Alyse's relationships within the Powys circle as well as details concerning her attitude to world events, her current reading, philosophy of life & responses to day-to-day life in post-war Chydyok in Dorset & later North Devon. . . They are of great interest not only for the light they throw on the personal lives of the Powys family members but for future biographers of Alyse Gregory herself. . . £2.500."

From WARREN HOUSE PRESS: John Cowper Powys, Horned Poppies: New Poems. 48pp. 250 copies. £7.50 plus postage. A valuable new item from the many offerings of Kenneth Hopkins. Write: 12 New Road, N. Walsham, Norfolk NR28 9DF, England.

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