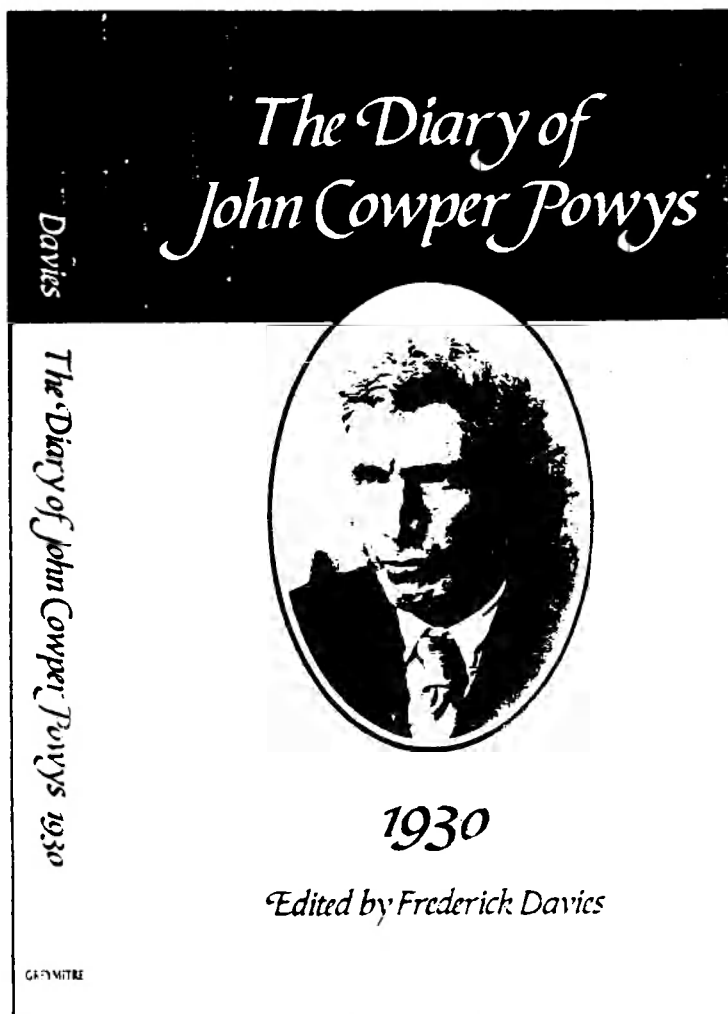


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ARND BOHM

WOLF SOLENT AS AN ANATOMY OF HISTORY

Although Wolf Solent does not end with a bang, neither is the conclusion a whimper. Solent's resolution of "'Well, I shall have a cup of tea.'"¹ is an antithesis to the turbulence of a world where voyeurism, incest, repressed homosexuality, possible necrophilia, sure adultery and occasional cruelty seem almost ordinary. It is a punch line with which Powys undercuts much of the modern world and especially all that activity around the construction of history. History is to be eliminated in order to make room for drinking a cup of tea. The two-edged wit of this closing gives a clue that the novel belongs in the tradition of the anatomy.²

Anatomy, as Northrop Frye has reminded us, is a particular kind of satire: The word 'anatomy' in Burton's title means a dissection or analysis, and expresses very accurately the intellectualized approach of his form. We may as well adopt it as a convenient name to replace the cumbersome and in modern times misleading 'Menippean satire.'³

The subject is dissected and analyzed in order to reveal its form, and in order to advance therapy. Frye has also noted that this genre is well-suited for dealing with "abstract ideas and theories," especially those which are "diseases of the intellect."⁴ This leads directly to the theme of Wolf Solent. For Powys, memory and its institutionalized variant, history, were such afflictions of the mind. Powys had already suggested this remedy in The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant:

To forget almost everything! To forget the look they saw once in the eyes of their dearest friend. To forget the thoughts which passed through their own minds as they glanced askew, at the corpse of their wife, their husband, their brother. To forget every morning what every yesterday brought forth of hideousness and murderous malice. To forget the hollow spaces that lie beyond the friendly sun and the familiar stars. To forget the maggots and the lice, the torture-chambers and the slaughter-houses, the vivisectioning rooms and the everlasting excrement. To forget the raking necessity and the insolent monotony of the biological mechanism that jolts us forward from day to day. To forget how many people have been born and have yet to be born⁵ before the planetary death-dance has frozen into ghastly rigidity.

Learning how to forget is the task that will confront Wolf Solent.

It will not be easy for him to accomplish forgetting, since he suffers acutely from a vivid, persistent, powerful memory. Solent is unable to forget things. The leitmotiv for this is the recurrence of the man's face at Waterloo Station, an image which returns again and again to Solent's mind, especially at critical moments (WS 11; 47; 471; 626, for example). But this image is only the worst symptom of a virulent memory. All sorts of details assail Solent from the past:

The scavenging obsession of the wishing-bone allowed him to omit nothing that he could rake up out of a thousand obscure half-memories. The thumbnail-parings of a nameless old tramp sitting by a milestone on the Bristol road . . . the amber coloured drop of rheum in the eye of a one-eyed doorkeeper of a house of ill-fame in Soho . . . the torn-off corner of a butcher's advertisement lying in a gutter outside St. Paul's . . . the left arm of a china doll thrown on an ash-can under the west door of Ely Cathedral . . . the yellow excrement of a dog, shaped like a dolphin adhering to the north wall of the Brighton Aquarium . . . the white spittle of a drunken cabman outside the station at Charing Cross . . . the hair-clippings from an unknown head, wrapped in a French comic paper and dropped in the public urinal at Eastbourne . . . such things, and others like them, all parts and parcels of what humanity sets itself to forget, did Wolf and the wishing-bone redeem from the limbo of the obliterated memory and gather in a heap on the kitchen table of Number Thirty Seven Preston Lane! (WS 452-53).

Solent is passive in this remembering as the chain of bizarre associations links itself together. He endures these surges of recollection in the way that a sick person might suffer a spasm of fever chills. There seems to be little that he can do to prevent or control them. Worse still, they interfere with his life. The memories come between him and reality, they interrupt interactions with others, they depress him and prevent happiness from taking hold.

In a masterful satiric move, Powys has elected just this man, for whom the past is a source of torment, to be a historian. Indeed, Solent is to be a historian in several aspects. For years, he had already been miserable as a history teacher:

He was now thirty-five, and for ten years he had laboriously taught History at a small institution in the city of London, living peacefully under the despotic affection of his mother[. . .]. (WS 10)

Later in the novel he will again teach at a local school, going rather mechanically through the chronology of English history:

All through January and February, Wolf lived out his life with obstinate, stoical acceptance. He led his pupils at the Grammar School patiently and thoroughly through the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV. (WS 476)

If this activity is not directly threatening because it has long since become routine, it cannot bring true solace either. The history of the schoolbooks and schoolmasters washes over the pupils and teachers without altering their lives.

A change comes into Solent's life when he is propelled by circumstance into becoming an active historian. Surely this would be the proper vocation for a compulsive rememberer! But the history which Mr. Urquhart wants to have written is not the usual kind. Urquhart's first description of the project sounds like an anticipation of the histoire totale of the French Annales school of historians:

'Our History will be an entirely new genre,' Mr. Urquhart was saying.

'What I want to do is to isolate the particular portion of the earth's surface called 'Dorset'; as if it were possible to decipher there a palimpsest of successive strata, one inscribed below another, of human impression. Such impressions are for ever being made and for ever being obliterated in the ebb and flow of events; and the chronicle of them should be continuous, not episodic.' (WS 41)

Quickly, though, Urquhart reveals his true grotesque vision of how this authentic history might be written. On the plausible grounds that it is impossible to record everything and that selection is necessary, Urquhart proposes a startling strategy for dealing with the problem:

Mr. Urquhart proceeded. 'We must select, my friend. We must select.

All history lies in selection. We can't put in everything. We must put in only what's got pith and sap and salt. Things like adulteries, murders, and fornications.' (WS 42)

Solent's comment that this seems to indicate "a sort of Rabelaisian chronicle" is apt. Urquhart's history would be a satire against the countless local histories sponsored and written by antiquarians. The twist is that this new history openly proclaims an interest in the seamier side of community affairs. The implication is clear enough: this would produce a local history which everyone would actually want to read, because it would reveal the things which people want to know. Urquhart is convinced that this scurrilous history would be a best-seller:

'That's the value of a book like ours, eh, me boy?' cried the Squire.

'It'll be kept on newspaper-stands on the top of great iron landing-stages for people to pick up as they start for Australia or Siberia! It'll tickle their fancy, eh? What? By Jove it will . . . to learn what treacherous snakes their ancestors were.' (WS 586)

That he is probably right in his assessment again confirms the point of the satire. When all is said and done, the element of historical writing that appeals to a majority is little more than gossip about ancestors.

After dangling the lure of the exposé of "Dorset" in front of the readers, Powys frustrates us by never revealing the text. In a technique which he may have learned from Poe, Powys alludes to various sources from which the hidden text has been assembled, sources in Urquhart's library or in Malakite's bookshop, as if they really existed. Could we perhaps reconstruct the hidden text if we only located these sources? The concealed history serves to arouse the prurient curiosity in the readers of the novel. What and where are the

scandals transcribed and elaborated by Solent?

The unavailable history becomes through its absence a competitor for the text which is present, namely that of the novel. Simultaneously, the novel refuses to disclose the "History of Dorset" and is in fact a history of Dorset. The text we confront reflects the text we never see. Wolf Solent's investigations of the lives of the inhabitants of Ramsgard run parallel to his writing for Urquhart. The results of Solent's investigations should probably have been included in Urquhart's book, for there is no dearth of secretiveness, scandal and perversion in the present. Would these be included? There is no way to check, but it seems unlikely just because Solent is unable to distance himself from his own life. Instead he projects his emotions into the chronicle:

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. (WS 476)

The more Solent identifies with the role of the satirist, the easier it is for him to write. In his view, he is only approaching "Swift-like malignity" because the subject matter requires it. He does not notice his rush of pleasure in transforming history into satire. Nor does he take into reckoning the work on the other text being constructed through Solent, whose prying and probing is reported in the novel by a hidden narrator. The congruence of the two investigations is indicated by Christie when Solent has finished the manuscript:

'The "History of Dorset",' he said eagerly. 'That awful book, you know.' He tried to speak facetiously.

'I gave the old chap's lechery a twist in my own direction. It's still pretty awful, but it's not just pure bawdiness any more. In fact, I'd like some people I know to read it. It's ferocious. It's like Swift.' Over Christie's expressive face, its whiteness blotched by faint red marks from the violent usage she had given it, flitted a tender, ironical smile.

'You're like Swift, Wolf,' she murmured, 'coming into people's rooms and poking among their things.' (WS 495)

Solent has made the text "like Swift," more viciously satirical, in order to make it a moralizing history, more than "just pure bawdiness." The satirical mode would raise the chronology of lust to a coherent social history. Solent has been the anatomist there, in that text. But he has been blind to his pleasure in the writing as a satirist and to his ruthlessness in questioning and prying, always with a view to the worst in people and their lives. He has violated Christie's trust by reading her private book "with the feverish excitement of a sacrilegious thief." What he reads could have been used as source material to document the completed history, for it reveals the sordid relationships in which Christie is ensnared. What would remain elusive is Solent's own involvement, represented by the violating act of reading a text which was never meant for others to see. As Christie observes, it is when Solent is unaware of his satirical function that he most resembles the satirist. However, he cannot give himself the name "Swift" as long as he is playing the role of historian, no matter how much the two activities resemble each other.

The conundrum of Wolf Solent may be expressed as follows: the target of the satire is history, but the means is a history too. History is to be overcome in the way that melancholy should be cured through Burton's Anatomy. But the

narrative of the novel must resemble a history and will continually threaten to turn upon itself. There is momentary balance between the constructive and destructive work through the trick of the concealed text, which can be conjured up and yet withheld. In time, however, the destabilization spreads and the encompassing frame--the novel--must also be consumed by satire.

Such must be the final outcome of a campaign against memory, against history. The advocacy of forgetting is a direct contradiction to the mnemonic capacity of every text. How can one take a novel of some six hundred pages seriously when it promotes forgetting? There is some difficulty in dealing with the contradiction between Powys the prophet of forgetting and Powys the prolific writer. Writing and publishing so much were hardly the way to do forgetting. Given the evidence, one might suggest that Powys had an implicit corollary. The proposition "One must forget" would be qualified by "One must remember what Powys has said." This conjunction is logically permitted for the satirist even though it is prohibited to the historian.

The gradual triumph of the figure of Swift is consistent with the eclipse of a historian, Thomas Hardy. Although it is a commonplace of criticism to report Powys's loyalty to Hardy, there are good reasons to suspect rivalry in the relationship as well. The very project of Wolf Solent is problematic when considered as a counterfoil to Hardy's depiction of the landscape and history of "Wessex." "Wessex" was an abstraction, derived from the elements of a real existing countryside. The source for this abstraction was to a large extent Dorset, and it is this same Dorset which Powys reveals more starkly than Hardy could ever have dared. It does not take a strained imagination to see certain resemblances between Hardy and Solent as local historians. The reactions of Hardy's Victorian readers to his revelations of life in the rural English world defined Hardy's novels as prototypes of the scandalous history which Solent will finally produce. By implication, Hardy's novels will be displaced by a more authentic, more comprehensive history of the region and the mentality of its inhabitants. The suggestion that the actual Dorset has been obscured by earlier interpretations has been made by Urquhart in his reference to a "palimpsest of successive strata." A palimpsest refers to writing and to erasure. Here, the works of Hardy are one of the layers of writing which must be taken off in order to expose a more fundamental level. Elements which were only dimly perceived in Hardy's text, such as the gross embodiment of sensuality, will now stand forth.

Hardy was not wrong, but is to be improved, because in his time he had been unable to reveal the complete history of Dorset. He was forced to be elusive and evasive, to the extent of having to transport the action to the reserve of a semi-fictional "Wessex." Powys both acknowledges and satirically explodes Hardy's name into Wolf Solent in an intertextual gambit:

'I expect I've worked myself into a fuss by reading Thomas Hardy! One day you shall take me down to Weymouth and we'll walk over to the White Horse and the Trumpet-Major's village. Yes, and we'll go in and see who's living in Penn House now, where your grandmother was. You'd like that, wouldn't you?' (WS 415)

This comes after one of the most brutal attacks upon Solent's identity by his mother. Her outburst she blames on "reading Thomas Hardy." Why? What would so upset Mrs. Solent? Surely it must be that in Hardy's gloomy atmosphere and tragic plots she recognized the affinities to her own shattered life in the village. Her husband's philandering, the remorseless gossip, the sense of imprisonment in a closed society would all have been evoked for her. The burdensome presence of the fictional landscape is underscored by the fact that they could actually go to "the White Horse and the Trumpet-Major's village."

The incident is closely linked to his assertion of a personal identity, directly against the mother and indirectly against Thomas Hardy. The threat

veiled in Wolf's determination is that he might, as the new, all-seeing and all-telling chronicler, include his parents in this history. That would bring the narrative home, out of the world of Hardy's historical abstractions to the reality of Ramsyard.

Just as Solent was not Swift when he intended to be and yet was Swift in his actions, so he will and will not be Hardy. As a historian of Dorset, he will play Hardy's role, transcribing the biographies of the most ordinary people into chronicles for all to read. This entails supplanting Hardy, who has already undertaken such a history from below. Within the novel, the new chronicler of Dorset is Solent, but as the author of the novel, it is Powys who will replace Hardy. One could say that with Hardy's death in 1928, the tradition of the Victorian historical narrative came to a close. Wolf Solent appeared a year later: a satire on the nineteenth-century hope that history could still bring about an Enlightenment. Since the previous century, history had been an instrument of reason, a tool of modernization. The vanity of faith in history had already been emptied by Nietzsche, whom Powys read and admired. Nietzsche had touched on the sore point. In order to achieve a spiritual regeneration, the historian would have to take human passions and the whole range of feelings into the moral economy. This required the wilful forgetting of the tasks of reason and a tacit acceptance of non-rationality into human life.

In Wolf Solent, Powys went further and maintained that the dilemma of how to let the irrational emerge could not be solved by taking the rational discursive traditions as seriously as they had taken themselves. Those traditions must be forgotten. Although history is the main target in this novel, philosophy of a high order is also mocked, as an ordinary village girl struggles to make sense of it all:

'I suppose it's funny to talk such a way,' she went on, 'but all these queer non-human abstractions, like Spinoza's 'substance' and Leibnitz's 'monads' and Hegel's 'ideas' don't stay hard and logical to me. They seem to melt.' (WS 87)

Only forgetting such texts would bring release. Powys was not yet making the argument of, for example, Foucault, that the rational discourse is culpable for the production of the irrational. Instead, Powys drew upon the mystic tradition to argue that that which is real and true eludes the historian. The ground of being is always just beyond the reach of the historical narrative. Remembering is always a distortion of reality. Forgetting--the kind of unexpected forgetting which at last overcomes Wolf Solent--is the only means of access to genuine knowledge.

Forgetting is necessary in order for the human biological memory to become attuned to the totality of nature. By accepting this forgetting, Solent achieves a liberation from the duality in his self. Just before the end of the novel, when he has resolved to break with the habits of the probing historian, Solent's mind is caught by an apparently inconsequential detail:

His eye happened to catch sight of a large grey snail with its horns extended, ascending the tarred boards of the shed. It had just left a pallid dock-leaf that spread itself out against the boarding, and to which its slime still adhered. His mind rushed off to thousands and thousands of quiet spots, behind outhouses, behind stick-houses, behind old haystacks, behind old barns and sheds, where such grey snails lived and died in peace, covering docks, nettles, and silver-weed with their patent slime! How often had he hurried past such places with hardly a glance! And yet their combined memory reconciled him more to life than all Roger Monk's flower-beds. (WS 643)

The "combined memory" of primordial existence reunifies the individual with nature. Gone is the interposition of the schooled glaze, of the categorizing modern mind.

The whelming of history would begin a new age, represented in the novel by the famous passage about "Saturnian gold." Ned Lukacher has interpreted this in Freudian terms, emphasizing the oedipal elements.⁸ This casts a pall over what should, in Powys's context, be a celebration. The return of Saturn would reinvigorate the barren landscape. It would reverse the rebellion of Jupiter, which had begun the cycle of history. Operating for a return to the golden Saturnian age, for the restoration of "unspeakable beauty," is Powys's satire. Etymologically, satire belongs with Saturn, through the satyr, whose boundless desire destroys convention and incorporates abundant vitality.⁹ Long driven by his lusts, Solent finally accepts his own central position between the satirical and the Saturnian:

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 ink-stains and endure! (WS 643)

All that is left of textuality is "ink-stains," as the signifiers will be meaningless marks to someone who is in touch with the universal. Solent renounces history and even accepts that Carfax has loved Solent's wife and his mother. The prospect of drinking a cup of tea, of satisfying the urges of the body, outweighs the remembrance of things past. Wolf Solent is indeed an anatomy of history: it is the history of a satyr.

NOTES

1. John Cowper Powys, Wolf Solent (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), 644. Subsequent references given parenthetically as WS.
2. I was directed to this connection by Hans Kellner, "Disorderly Conduct: Braudel's Mediterranean Satire," History and Theory 18 (1979), 197-222, especially 204-06. Hugh Ormsby-Lennon first drew my attention to Kellner's provocative article.
3. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1957), 311-12.
4. Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 309.
5. John Cowper Powys, The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant (Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1926), 18.
6. Traian Stoianovich, French Historical Method: the Annales Paradigm (Ithaca/London: Cornell U. P., 1976), 102-133, "An Impossible Histoire Globale."
7. Some of the differences in the use of setting are discussed by Colin Style, "On Hardy's Sacred Ground: John Cowper Powys's Weymouth Sands," The Powys Review 17 (1985), 27-38; and by W.J. Keith, "John Cowper Powys and the Regional Tradition," Powys Notes 2.2 (1986), 1-7.
8. Ned Lukacher, "Notre-Homme-des-Fleurs: Wolf Solent's Metaphoric Legends," The Powys Review 11 (1979/80), 64-73.
9. Frederick Ahl, Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets (Ithaca/London: Cornell U.P., 1985), 227.

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Review of The Diary of John Cowper Powys: 1930, edited with an introduction by Frederick Davies. London: Greymitre Books, 1987. £35 including post and packing. Greymitre Books Ltd., 36 Great Queen Street, London, WC2.

The publication of the first part of The Diary of John Cowper Powys (1930) is a major literary event, and it is to be hoped that the efforts of Frederick Davies and Jeffery Kwintner to open the diaries will be followed by supplementary efforts: the Journal, after all, runs on for several decades. At the particular moment when the Journal gets started, Powys is in the process of completing three significant moves. He is settling down in Phudd Bottom in upper New York State, he is beginning the writing of his most impressive novel, A Glastonbury Romance, and he is bringing his relationship with Phyllis Playter to a point of erotic and literary consummation. More than anything else, the 1930 Diary shows us how these three moments cohere so as to create a crucial shift in the writer's life, philosophy, and creativity.

Temporally, the 1930 Journal falls into two quite different parts: a rather unhappy and disjointed one, dominated by the strain of excessive lecture tours, and a happy one, illuminated by the pleasures and excitements of Phudd Bottom. Structurally, the Journal also falls into quite different extremes: on the one hand we are furnished with countless scraps of trivial information; on the other hand, we are provided with moments of intellectual and spiritual illumination similar to those found in the literary works themselves.

The Powysian trivia are of course not trivia to the Powys scholar. John Cowper's interest in the minute details of natural life create a metaphysical "pressure" on things that are nonmetaphysical, or seem so. We find out more about his preference for blue (29, 34, 57) and his dislike of red (161), about that hate of colorlessness (33) that causes him even to take extra pleasure in humans when they are "coloured" (32). We find out more about his complex reaction to America: how he grew to find a "sacred" quality in its landscape (44), how he appraised the atmosphere of the American South (39, 41), and above all how he came to love all of Columbia County (183) as his perfect Paradise (215). Phyllis Playter, by contrast, detests Columbia County and New York State (165). In fact the rural Phudd that he quickly loves so much (88) is a source of direct displeasure for his companion, the Indian and Dutch components being insufficient for her (162). Clearly, Phyllis's tendency to fall into a death-mood (89, 90, 133, 148) caused John Cowper to associate his fondness for Phudd with feelings of guilt (112, 162), and although the quarrels between the two are infrequent (90, 131), it is clear that the contrasting responses to the new habitation cause considerable strain. Phyllis desires a "Gothic," European North, while John Cowper only has to slip into the slightly more rugged parts of Hillsdale to feel distressed by the vanishing of that pastoral gentleness which was his planetary element (61, 115). The violence of nature---whether as height or heat (117)---had to be broken and subdued for him to reach states of pure enjoyment. Mother Nature was oppressive when her fecundity was too obvious (ibid.). The rejection of violence is as important here as in the literary works. The question of hurting or not hurting animals (93, 105), climaxing in concern for hunted whales (40) and forlorn trout (130, 167) helps create that mythological image of Powys as "the holy man of the fish" (139) which gets translated into A Glastonbury Romance in terms of the Holy Tench, or Ichty's, perceived inside the luminous waters of the Grail.

Powys indeed worships his Ichty's much as he worships other individual organisms and objects at Phudd Bottom. Such worship is a function of John Cowper's persistent rejection of monotheism. It is often his intention to

"defy the First Cause" (133), a tendency that can cause him to make ugly faces at it in the night (67). This preoccupation with the defiance of the First Cause (82) amounts of course to direct blasphemy--a notion that John Cowper, far from fearing, enjoys with considerable intensity. When he is venomously scolded by the unctuously episcopal (54), he hardly seems upset, and when he discusses his profane bed-time pleasures as negotiations with the "saintly" (121), the mixture of blasphemy and sincere worship seems as stunningly natural as everywhere else in the opus: "it was like making love to a little Saint Therèse" (ibid.).

Prayer, then, is not directed to God, but to an array of quasi-pagan figures. He worships "the god of the hill" (74), he kneels in the snow to adore the sun (213), he visits "the God of Phudd" (199)--and he prays to the apple tree (137, 141), to the earth goddess Demeter (144), or to the Moon (123, 124). A Glastonbury Romance obviously moves from the solar (chapter 1) to the lunar (the tides of the end), a motion that can be related to John Cowper's distinction between "Sun-Borns" and "Moon-Borns like myself" (167).

The practical and theoretical rejection of monotheism is obviously strengthened by Powys's lectures on polytheism (60). Yet, as I have emphasized elsewhere, the monotheism/polytheism problematic is far from simple in this writer--the Cowperverse identifying itself, precisely, as an equivocation between universe and multiverse. In this fundamental Cowperist conflict between the One and the Many, it is, as Frederick Davies correctly points out, possible to discuss a shift from the "monologic" to what Bakhtin conceived as the "polyphonic" (10). In that event, the transition from Wolf Solent to A Glastonbury Romance could be conceived as a movement from unity to diversity, from the One to the Many. Without at all questioning the relevance of the editor's remark here (which is perfectly correct at the level of narrative technique), I would however like to call attention to a quite opposite movement: one away from the Many and toward the One. Indeed, I submit that the centermost literary-critical value of the 1930 journal is to clarify this very shift toward encompassing coherence and centred unity. (From this viewpoint, the ontologically--as distinct from narratologically--"polyphonic" novel is Wolf Solent.)

In my view, woman--or Phyllis Playter, if you will--plays an absolutely crucial role in this transition toward unity at the expense of disjunction, the One at the expense of the Many. As I have tried to show (in the process of a serious analysis that cannot be dismissed as "twaddle"), this clash between the Many and the One engages precisely those cosmic and logical tensions that Hegel once clarified. Indeed, as the editor's reference to a later Diary entry shows us, John Cowper was perfectly aware of the Hegelian slant and the Hegelian relevance: "She [Phyllis] made me make Philip nicer at the end so as to gain the true balance of the Hegelian Tragedy," 2nd January 1932 (5). In fact it takes astonishing philosophical naïveté to fail to recognize that the entire "Cybele" ending in A Glastonbury Romance comes as close (in cosmo-logical vision) to the end of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit as any literary work could come.

The interesting point here, however, is not that superobvious Hegelian conception as such, but the role of woman in its effectuation: "That Cybele end was entirely due to Phyllis" (5).

Woman, it is evident, plays an enormously important part in Powys's new literary outlook. She, Phyllis, completes this influence in three ways: (1) by inspiring the writer, (2) by directing his inspiration, and (3) by curtailing its excesses. All of these three types of influence work toward the Glastonbury "Totality" that we all recognize: Grail/Hologram/Unity/Comprehensiveness/Coherence. We may look at the three operative aspects individually, but in reverse order.

Phyllis Playter clearly had a "pull-things-together" or "pull-yourself-together" attitude that differed significantly from John Cowper's more wayward, errant, and erratic mentality. It is therefore not surprising that she tries to turn Powys's sacred daydreams into centered acts of concentrated contemplation (66). She understands the outward-bound motion of his "ecstasy" (26, 39, 50, 97, 114, 127, 130, 207) less than its inward-bound gravity and ponderousness. Wisely, of course, Powys never abandoned his philosophy of "daydreams"; yet it is obvious he did allow Phyllis to cut away several significant portions of his fictional opus. She suggests shortenings of the fourteenth chapter of the Romance (210), and she prevents the novel from spilling over into France (129). In other words, she is restricting the "polyphonic" dimension, allowing it only an energy that will work inside the framework of the rounded whole.

Turning now to Phyllis's creative (rather than curtailing) suggestions, we see often that she gives advice on specific issues of character (162) and plot (184). Often, Powys complies directly: "So shall it be" (ibid.) She also suggests areas of possible expansion--for instance, the entire "Aristocratic" part of the Romance (210). Here, supplementary material serves the purpose of forwarding a sense of comprehensiveness and totality rather than a sense of (geographic) errancy, as in the case of the "French" parts. More important than these specific pieces of particular advice, however, is the fact that Phyllis could grasp the entire concept of a literary project. As soon as John Cowper mentions the general and tentative conception of his Glastonbury book, she immediately reveals to him that she shares the primordial creative intuition behind the literary vision: "O she understands everything" (66). As the editor observes, such conceptual empathy, tricky as it may sometimes be, is absolutely essential with a writer like John Cowper (17), and we can therefore only congratulate ourselves upon the lucky circumstances that brought Powys and Phyllis Playter together. Indeed, Phyllis's conceptual grasp on Powys seems almost to exceed Powys's own grasp! "How much wiser is she than I am" (66). She forces Powys to stick to a concept of his work that is, already, beyond the substance of the work. She provides a free conceptuality that resists the less-than-fully-conceptual energy of his ongoing creativity. It is indeed probably this ability of hers to conceptualize a work for Powys (much as critics conceptualize works after their publication) that causes her to want to name the book in terms of the idea of its (quasi-Hegelian) ending; Never or Always (192). This title, turned down by the publishers and by Llewelyn Powys, opposes "A Glastonbury Romance" by being temporal and conceptual rather than spatial and concrete--suggesting perhaps the opposed poles toward which Phyllis and John Cowper veered in their different ways. Yet the title proposed by Phyllis, strained as it may seem, sums up precisely that law and logic of cosmic equivocation that Hegel picked up from the pre-Socratic philosophers, and which Powys himself identifies in the Diary as "the play of paradoxical Heraclitan universe...the war of contraries" (77).

If we now turn to the third aspect of Phyllis's influence, that of inspiration, we see that it has profound consequences not only for the quality of Powys's writing, but also for its metaphysical pattern. As I have pointed out, Powys's worship of various objects and natural phenomena at Phudd suggests his constitutionally "polytheistic" temper; yet there is one thing that is worshipped more than any of these phenomena, and that is Phyllis. At 58 he has truly fallen in love with this woman of 35. This woman is felt to be intensely seductive (145-46, 154), and it appears that her enchanting presence promoted a period of sexual harmony in which John Cowper overcame certain long-standing reserves vis-a-vis woman in general and love-making in particular. Viewed as a peak sensation (109) and as something affording no restraints (146), love-making expands from sexual drive into cosmic principle.

"To be in love is the natural state of living things" (45). "Love," here, is no longer that particular emotion that one human directs at another, tragically (42), but that absolute interpenetration of subject and object that Hegel celebrated as the purpose of the universe, and that John Cowper Powys enjoyed ecstatically at Phudd Bottom.

Much of the "polytheistic" energy now in fact comes to be absorbed into the single and singular presence of one woman: creating, as it were, "monotheistic" reality with a feminine atmosphere. Indeed, most of the objects that get worshipped by Powys (in polytheistic fashion) are here at Phudd, already, aspects of the feminine One: the Moon, Demeter, Cybele, and so forth. They usually suggest the contours of a circle: the outline of a rondure--like that of the Grail itself--which can contain, within its circumference, what ought to be "outside" it. As we progress through the 1930 Diary, in point of fact, progressing with the writer toward his Glastonbury vision of the Grail, images of circles and half-circles begin to crowd the pages, some of the later, wintry sights becoming almost hallucinatory (206, 208, 210). The full moon suggests such cosmic circularity (123, 187), and the rainbow, in "shape like the Holy Grail," does so with even greater emphasis (75). Such circles, however, remain ontologically unstable, suggesting negation as well as affirmation, hollowness as well as repletion, Non-Being as well as Being, anti-matter as well as matter, unreality as well as reality, "Never" as well as "Always." The "full moon" may suggest its own absence (141), just as the sun at dawn makes a "gap" (180) rather than its own presence. (This latter impression is depicted in an actual drawing, such is the force of the impression.)

I am saying, then, that the 1930 Journal suggests the foregrounding of one woman, and that this foregrounding effectuates a cosmic appropriation on the level of metaphysical suggestion in the Cowperverse: the One, for the moment, has dominion over the Many. The Many, indeed, can be safely celebrated and affirmed, precisely because they are so firmly monitored and comprehended by the "feminine" center of the cosmic vision. However much the subsidiary portions are intensified, their intensification constitutes no threat to the center--to the Grail, if you will. This ascendancy of woman-as-center manifests itself in the 1930 Diary in terms of countless references to the figure of the mother (38, 74, 152, 154, 163, 189). This figure may be John Cowper's own mother, or the Virgin Mary (55), or a numinous presence that is both of these at once (140). Our Lady is more important than Christ (34), or at least his equal (*ibid.*).

Since John Cowper's mother approximates "Cybele" herself (79), the Nature goddess who rounds off the literary vision, and since The Odyssey, literature's origin, "is really the work of a woman" (99), we face in this year of "new philosophy" and surging inspiration (58) a Powysian engagement with femininity that is unprecedented. Writing is now a test of virility, woman providing her encouragement after each individual act of daily creation (49, 85, 129, 132, 151, 184). Because, in Phyllis Playter, Powys feels that he has attained his feminine ideal, "absolutely" (200), and because Phudd Bottom for a substantial stretch of time emerges as "Paradise" (215), there is created that peculiar sense of the possibility of absolute fulfillment which, as I have argued, underlies the "Hegelian" conception of reality as well as the Cowperist conception of the possibility of the Grail. A man who knows absolute fulfillment is likely to compose a philosophy, or world-vision, that is radically different from that of a man who has not known absolute fulfillment. For Powys, this absolute happiness--spawning the vision of the Absolute--comes as a surprise, creating an evasion of that normally restless world of his which is not only polytheistic but polygamous. He now "has the power of Monogamy. Who would have thought it?" (126).

The Hegelian, unitary, "centered" vision should of course not be overemphasized; as later novels like Owen Glendower will show, Powys will eventually move back toward that polytheistic, disjunctive, and nomadic (non)identity that we, and Harvard Psychologists (65), have glimpsed in Wolf Solent. There another type of woman dominates--and another type of man. Even here, in this sexually "stable" period, we hear John Cowper telling us, with sardonic amusement, about that special entente cordiale with woman that only can be achieved through perversity, eccentricity and oddness (56). In a sense, moreover, Phyllis Playter could herself be seen as an enemy of the theocentric. She urges John Cowper to stay away from religious complacency, to follow Nietzsche in being distrustful of safety--to experience the spirit of creation as contradiction and troublesome divorce rather than as unctuous fixity (75). It is this understanding--so difficult for some readers--of reality as original difference that forms the nucleus of A Glastonbury Romance. The First Cause is not only divided, but divided originally. Thus it produces difference, not beatitude. Resolution only comes to the one prepared to stare at that original production of difference and paradox. The various astonishingly direct statements on Communism in the Diary (155) need to be viewed in the light of such contradiction; violence does not face violence, but only only another form of violence, so that politics consists of choosing between degrees of human suffering (172). Pacifism evades such choice (ibid.). (Notice how John Cowper gets scolded for his engagements with the "Lower Classes," 202.)

It emerges from the Diary that John Cowper is constantly involved with issues of causation. If a change or an impression is made, Powys wants to find out the cause. What has triggered a new mood (160), or the thrill from a certain color (162)? It is this persistent application of logic to the minutest responses of daily life that sets Powys apart from the generally Buddhistic or Oriental schools of thought. He does not just adore or contemplate. He thinks and gets intellectually involved. This process of minute self-analysis extends also to the highest levels of awareness. These are not left simply to "be." "I had an ecstasy. Why was this?" (207). Of course such questions can become blind alleys. There "is" no cause. But even that, noncausation, is not something Powys has taken for granted, merely intuited. Even the absence of logic can be deduced; even the absence of thought can be thought.

The greatest risk with the Diary is that it will be discontinued; let us pray for its continuation and for the obliteration of all its enemies. The second greatest risk with the Diary is that psychologically naive people will actually mistake the "self" of the Diary for John Cowper Powys himself! Clearly the "self" in the Diary of a truly great writer is just as much of a projection as any other significant imaginative figure of his creation. Precisely by getting projected into the human and nonhuman landscapes of the imagination, by having his personality and self endlessly dispersed into the literary achievements, the "self" that faces the writer when he is "off duty" is not a full self. As Maurice Blanchot once wrote, the Journal of a great writer is like a parapet walk, overlooking the path of (literary) writing, and sometimes coinciding with it; it seeks to overcome the fear and dread of the solitude of writing by persuading the subject that he still belongs to time and everydayness: precisely the things he has abandoned. A structural "insincerity" is thus operative from the outset in any "Journal"--so that what we get is not the rock-bottom "truth" underlying the passions of the imagination but instead that pole of humble finitude where the creative spirit can find refuge from its magnitude.

H. W. FAWKNER is the author of The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys (1986).

John Cowper Powys, Horned Poppies: New Poems. Warren House Press: North Walsham, Norfolk, 1986. 48pp. £7.50.

Most readers of Powys Notes are likely to have read the damning discussion of this book in The Powys Review (No. 20), where Bernard Jones, with inside editorial knowledge, authoritatively lists its scholarly shortcomings. The forty-two poems are said to be hitherto unpublished and selected from original manuscripts, but no locations are given, no information is offered, no editorial principles described, no editor named. Even for someone like myself, who has no knowledge of the immediate background, these facts speak for themselves.

Jones, then, has done the necessary hatchet-job, and thereby leaves me free to approach the book from a different angle. Moreover, he gives me an opening by offering the following remark about the reception of JCP's published volumes of poetry: "Attitudes to them swing between nonchalant dismissal or straightforward hostility, and outright refusal to read or listen." Jones insists that he does not share such views. Well, I do (though I am an enthusiast for the major novels), and I believe that I have read and listened. And what I hear is a collection of banal, pseudo-poetic conventionalities totally lacking in any originality of thought or subtlety of verse-rhythm. Here, for example, is a stanza from "The Celandine": "On some Spring evening--I forget / Whence I was journeying / Or whither was my purpose set-- / I came upon this thing." A Parody of Wordsworth? I wish I thought so. Or, from "Euonomé": "There shall be candles, one, two and three, / Euonomé! / One for him who was cruel to thee, / And one for her who was cruel to me, / And one for Christian charity!" An Edgar Allen Poe pastiche? But who cares?

This is "poetry" as defined by the man in the street: regular verse-forms, clear rhymes, high-sounding sentiments about subjects like love, nature, God, etc. But it is not poetry as understood by its leading practitioners and by those who know. Powys lived in the world of Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Rilke, etc., etc., and his attempts at verse are embarrassingly feeble when mentioned in the presence of such company. I am not arguing that individual poets must conform to the fashions of their age, but Powys's poetry is equally inept if compared with the work of more "traditional" poets like Frost or Edward Thomas or Hardy at his best.

The "publisher's note" in this book, speaking presumably on behalf of the anonymous editor, hints at a further volume (or volumes?) in which numerous Powys poems that appeared in magazines but are hitherto uncollected will be dutifully assembled and presented. The pedantic mind is incorrigible. Porius is clearly an original and (in terms of JCP studies, at least) a central novel that has never been published in its entirety. This is a literary scandal of major proportions, as all Powys readers know. Yet here are people scurrying around in search of fugitive poems, the likes of which could have been written (and have been written!) by hundreds of reasonably well educated people who are worthy citizens but decidedly not poets. No wonder "scholarship" is under attack in certain quarters.

Can anyone say, with confidence, that the interests of JCP are furthered by disseminating the kind of inane versifying found in Horned Poppies? On the contrary, these interests might well be seriously damaged. JCP needs to be protected from himself, from the poetically insensitive--and especially from Warren House Press.

W. J. KEITH's most recent work on the fiction of J.C. Powys is found in Regions of the Imagination: The Development of British Regional Fiction (Toronto, 1987.)

EDITOR'S NOTES

CONFERENCE '88. The FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the PSNA will be held at Carleton University, Ottawa, from June 3 to June 5, 1988. The Convenor will be Ben Jones who now invites suggestions and abstracts for papers and presentations. These should be sent to him as soon as possible. The address is: Department of English, Carleton University, Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6, Canada.

THE DIAL ARCHIVES OF SCHOFIELD THAYER and DR. JAMES SIBLEY WATSON, JR. Following our note (Spring, 1987) on the offering of the letters of Alyse Gregory, one-time editor of The Dial, it was of interest to hear first-hand news at the Hofstra Conference from STERLING M. DEAN concerning the final disposition of the separate archives of The Dial's co-owners, Scofield Thayer and Dr. James Sibley Watson, Jr.

Mr. Dean, who was formerly with the Library of Congress, reported on the successful efforts of recent months to save the Thayer collection from dispersal at auction, and of its eventual private purchase by Yale University and the Beinecke Foundation.

As to Dr. Watson's papers, these were carefully preserved by his widow, Nancy Watson Dean, and were acquired by the New York Public Library's Berg Collection in 1986. Writes Mr. Dean: "The Watson Archive contains 30 or more personal letters from the 1920s from Llewelyn Powys to both Dr. Watson and his wife, Hildegard, as well as several from Theodore Powys and many from Alyse Gregory. Then, too, at the Berg are letters, Sept. 7, 1925 - Nov. 9 1931, from T. F. Powys--I believe to Edward Sackville-West--that were in the Carl Van Vechten gift to the Library. It might be of interest to note that it was Dr. Watson who made it possible for Llewelyn Powys to go to the Rocky Mountains in the Spring of 1924 and have that incredible experience on the mountain top that he describes so beautifully in The Verdict of Bridlegoose."

From CATALOGUE 136 of JOHN WM. MARTIN, BOOKSELLER: "'T.F. Powys. The Key of the Field. London: Jackson, 1930. 1st Edition, orig. cloth, very good. Frontis. by R.A. Garnett. One of 550 copies signed by the author. \$67.50." This and 11 items by JCP. 231 S. La Grange Road, La Grange, IL 60525.

A worthwhile review of a new German issue of Wolf Solent--Jurgen Manthey, "I Shall Have a Cup of Tea," Die Zeit, Nr. 10, 6 Marz. 1987--contains interesting quotes on the novel by Peter Handke and Simone de Beauvoir.

BOOKS, NEW AND FORTHCOMING. Peter Casagrande, Thomas Hardy and the Modern Novel (New York: Macmillan, 1987). Chapter, "Hardy and Powys."

James Carley, Glastonbury Abbey: A Medieval Romance (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, January 1988).

John E. Van Domelin, Tarzan of Athens [Biography of G. Wilson Knight] (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1987).

Belinda Humfrey, ed., Essays on Wolf Solent (Cardiff: U. of Wales, 1988).

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