

Powys Notes

The semiannual journal and newsletter of the
Powys Society of North America

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The Powys Society of North America

Founded in December, 1983, the Powys Society of North America seeks to promote the study and appreciation of the literary works of the Powys family, especially those of John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), T.F. Powys (1875-1953), and Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939). The Society takes a special interest in the North American connections and experiences of the Powyses, and encourages the exploration of the extensive collections of Powys material in North America and the involvement, particularly of John Cowper and Llewelyn, in American literary culture.

Powys Notes, the Society's publication, appears in Spring and Fall issues and presents scholarship, reviews, and bibliography of Powysian interest. Submissions may be addressed to the Editor, at the Department of English, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383. Mac or IBM compatible discs with accompanying printed copy are welcome.

Exile and Presences: Powys's Nihilism

Ben Jones

What I propose to do in this paper is to discuss the close relationship, the intimacy, between Presence and Exile in Powys's fiction, concentrating on *A Glastonbury Romance*.¹ To do this I want to start with, and, as the paper develops, return to Nietzsche. And I want to show how Exile, Presence, Nihilism, and Nietzsche tell us something about Powys's language and his style. "Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?" (7). With these words from *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche foretells, from his perspective, the "history of the next two centuries" (3). One of them has already passed. The assertion itself we need not call Nietzschean: the general announcement that nihilism, in whatever of its forms, was waiting to be let in, was widespread in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The question posed—and the questions implied in the question "whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?"—these we can say are Nietzschean. Nietzsche asked the questions about nihilism. What is its origin? What is uncanny about it? Why can it be called a guest? At whose door? What has come about in human culture that such a sign has revealed its presence? Why is Nothing at the door. Why does Nothing want to be let in? Something has appeared, something without a name. The point may be debatable, but Nietzsche did not extend the invitation. He did not, as it were, light the fire. Something happened in human culture that led this guest to claim, indeed to expect, entry. Human culture is the door: the entrance to the house of Europe, the house of Ashover, King's Barton, the house of Crow (strewn across Somerset, Norfolk, and even Russia—*A Glastonbury Romance* is, after all, the story of a family), the rectory at Montacute, Phudd Bottom, the iron gate at Patchin Place, One Waterloo.

But the question: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests? And the answer. Out of the space and out of the time left vacant by the death of God. Wolf Solent sees the empty grave

waiting God's internment in the Basingstoke churchyard. The houses have been vacated, but the loss has not gone unnoticed. Something once had been present there. We think of St. Michael's Tower on the top of Glastonbury Tor. Once God's house. There is something uncanny, something frightening, about such a house, such a Tower, and it becomes vulnerable to the most unhousethlike of guests. In some cases the guest has already entered, indeed may have become the host. Is St. Michael's Tower such a case? Or Hell's Museum, or Mr. Malekite's bookshop? (I note here in passing only—as it will be familiar to many of you—the extraordinary complications of the German word "unheimlich" and its strange translation into English as "uncanny.") We think of Stephen Dedalus (whose very name means builder), who won't return to his room in the Martello tower, won't return to his family, and realizes that he is no longer a guest in Eccles Street, the house of Leopold and Molly Bloom. Or, of Wolf Solent, who drinks tea in lieu of having a house to dwell in (not to Gerda, not to his mother, Christie is forbidden, not to the workhouse which was his father's house, the "Land of his Father").

In the absence of Presence, Exile remains. It will not be necessary to trace the actual wanderings—the disconnections and the nomadic life have been identified for us, although it may be useful to comment anecdotally on the kind of exile that Phudd Bottom provided. To be away from the "presences" of New York City, to declare himself, finally, as housemate with Phyllis Playter, to have a place to write, a new Present, and then to discover that there was someone always at the door, to whom Phyllis had to serve tea (the evidence is in the diaries). We await the writing of Phyllis Playter's exile. The American girl obsessed with Europe, like Frances Gregg, still on the track (tract?) laid out by Henry James, the "Complex Fate," discovering in the idyllic world of Phudd Bottom that she was still doing the dishes, precisely that which she had devoted her life her to avoiding. And it wasn't even Europe. There was always somebody at the door. There always is somebody at the door.

Or, there is always a sign that presumes meaning, just because it is there, left over from something else. Such a sign is the famous signpost to Gorm, from *Ducdame*. Rook Ashover inquires casually about the sign. He says: "'What kind of village is Gorm?...I've seen that signpost ever since I was a child, but I can't remember ever having seen any place corresponding to it.'" His companion, Mr. Twiney, responds: " 'T'aint a village at all, Squire T'is writ a thik signpost and that's all I do mind' " (176). The sign

of Nothing. Let's pause for a moment on Mr. Twiney's name, incorporating as it does opposition, duality, fragmentation, duplicity. We are persistently reminded of such fragmentation in *Ducdame* (the title itself sets up the duality). Twiney duplicates the name of the idiot-boy Binnory, so close to binary.

The names, like the two dwarves (mis-shapen inheritors of a mis-shapen family), enforce the theme of unresolved oppositions that move the narrative. Rook is, after all, caught between two lovers, a mistress named Page, and a brother whose name, Lexie, must mean Word, or Vocabulary. Just what does such a configuration mean, to be in love with a page and a vocabulary? A life of writing? Try this: "Rook Ashover and the Spectres of Binary Oppositions." Rook is bird (carion bird), knight, and, perhaps, as Charles Lock has suggested, "Spirit" (from the pun on "ruach," Hebrew for Spirit). On one side, language codes that have become spectres: the "title" (as inherited rank) that must be preserved, and the anti-divine text, William Hastings's "Book of Annihilation," a religious text turned into malice. On the other side, the possibilities of a new language, a language of love to be realized through words and pages. But the words are sick, and the page is sterile. All of this is enacted in an aura of the uncanny, the "unhomelike": Binnory, Twiney, the dwarf twins, Betsy and Nancy Cooper, the apparition of the child, and the signpost to Nothing.

The Gorm signpost comes up once later in the text, when Rook faces the fact that he is going to be a father. Fatherhood is at the door. Such knowledge is compared to the Gorm signpost: it means nothing, it doesn't "stand" for anything, yet it was always here. It is uncanny, "unheimlich" (ghosts—and children—inhabit the living room). Yet the Gorm signpost's nothingness meant, uncannily, "everything" (383). The term "real presence" actually occurs in *Ducdame*, in the narrator's interpretation of Netta Page's "worst pang of loss," but it is the "vestige of any 'real presence'" (448) that is noted (emphasis mine).

Those who follow, or recognize, such signs are exiles, aliens, nomads, and they are themselves, in turn, signs of the nihilism that pervades Powys's texts. Exile in Powys is Exile from Presence. Like nihilism, Exile seems always to be at the door of Presence. We do not remember Presence, but we seem to remember that we forgot it. We do remember the passage on the red light of Real Presence in the "Whitelake Cottage" chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance*: Sam's rejection of a Real Presence, Matt's (usual) confusion, and the uncanny figures of Evans and Geard (this is his first appearance in the text) tracing out the letters "J.A." on the

"lidless and empty tomb of Joseph of Arimathea" (134).

Nietzsche is not absent from *A Glastonbury Romance*, and the occasion of his appearance is worth noting. As we know, Powys talked about Nietzsche in a number of places but never so humorously, or, perhaps, so sardonically, as in *Glastonbury* in the wonderful passage (at the beginning of the "Wookey Hole" chapter) on Mr. Wollop, his Honour, the Mayor of Glastonbury. Timothy Wollop was "one of the happiest men in Somersetshire," a man who "believed in the reality of thoughts and feelings," a man of presence, yet a man who spent all his working hours locked up in an iron cage purchased from a bankrupt bank. Rarely do we find such an exact portrait of the kind of human Being that Nietzsche called "Last Men," the kind of Man that must be overcome. It seems appropriate that within his very shop there is an enigmatic "herald"—I take the word from Morine Krissdottir—of his demise.

Mr. Wollop had once overheard one of his younger shop-assistants—a young man in whose sleek black hair he had come to take a quiet interest, wondering what hair-wash the lad patronised—refer to something called 'Neetchky.' From the context Mr. Wollop gathered that 'Neetchky' could hardly be the name of a hair-wash. It seemed rather to be some pious formula used by the young man, by which he threw off responsibility for having got some young woman into trouble. At that point Mr. Wollop's interest ceased, just as it had ceased when the question arose as to how the tabby cat had lost its ear. Mr. Wollop had no quarrel with young men who had formulas for dodging responsibility, as long as they did their work in the shop. What he was conscious of was a certain puzzled contempt for anyone whose selfishness was so weak and shaky that it required a pious formula. The appearance of things was the nature of things; and all things, as they presented themselves to his attention, in his house, in the street, and in his shop, fed his mind with slow, agreeable, unruffled ponderings. (212)

Here Powys seemingly takes a stand against Nietzscheanism and nihilism (the young man's formula that "Everything is permitted," particularly with young women). But is this certain? Wollop enjoys ontological complacency. He is the one who accepts being locked up

in an iron cage. He is a Last Man. The passage defies precise, that is to say closed, interpretation, but there is no doubt about the conscious intertwining in the narrative of presence, exile, and nihilism. The Nietzschean shop clerk makes three other appearances in the text: it was he who sold to William Zoyland the leather braces—I would call them suspenders, both metaphors work—that so fascinated Persephone Spear (who is both fetish and fetishist) on the afternoon of their mutually negotiated ravishment (893). He sells Mary Crow the table cloth which she will use, without success, to domesticate John Crow's "digs," and after Sam tells Mr. Wollop that he has seen the Grail, Mr. Wollop asks Sam, rhetorically, if his troublesome Nietzschean clerk will ever see the Grail.

Mr. Wollop is, then, a man of Presence, Self-Presence is a more accurate identification: where he was, there was the world. But, consistent with the ironic mischief of the text, he is also an exile. He even has an aura of exiles: the clerk, William Zoyland and Persephone (by the implication of the leather braces). To keep this going just a little longer, we remember that most people in Glastonbury wear garments and furnish their houses from Mr. Wollop's shop. Perhaps he even sells doors. Garments and furniture as false presence. Powys knows what he's doing.

But this kind of exile of the person, the human subject, or the kind of nihilism that attaches to the person, is not only what I want to talk about here. This approach to presence, exile and nihilism leads quickly to thinking about Powys's characters, and Powys himself, under the sign of the culture-hero, the exemplary Modern "Self," the seeker of perfected Being, of Oneness, of Powys as the Subject, as The Man, as the Emblem of One of a number of heroic faces. Such an interpretation will be incomplete. I am convinced that it is wrong. Rather than tracing exile in the Subject, then, The Man, I want to say a few things about language, the language of Presence and Exile, or, more appropriately stated, language as the Exile from Presence.

The death of God in this instance becomes the death of the Word, and the loss of Presence is the loss of Language. Ironically, it is also the Birth of Language. This is why the reading of *Ducdame* as a book about writing—as the spirit's attempt to love both the word and the page in the face of other, hostile texts—is so convincing. When I gave Morine Krissdottir the preliminary title of this paper (for the Cirencester conference), George Steiner's book *Real Presences* had just appeared. It was a text for discussion in my graduate seminar, and Steiner's evocation of the spirit of Powys is well known. I wondered why Powys does not get just a little note, just

one mention, in a book which seems to share Powys's confrontation of presence, exile, nihilism, and something that might be called "Real." Let me add, by way of gratitude, that at this time I was also reading Harald Fawkner's "Ontotheology and John Cowper Powys" in *Powys Review* 21. Charles Lock's presence is here, too: some discussions and the article on the "polyphonic" Powys (particularly pages 272–277).

Nihilism is at the door, and, presumably, does not know what to say. Or perhaps it speaks a totally unrecognizable language, as do the warders who invade Joseph K's house in *The Trial* (they are unrecognizable, of course, in a special way: their language is absolutely impertinent). Nor do we know what to answer. What does one say to the Absolutely Impertinent? To this question, Powys forms an answer. An answer formed from his own nihilism (I am not speaking absolutes here, I am not saying "Powys the Nihilist"). It is C. Wilson Knight who knows the source of Powys's answer: Nietzsche is the source, and it is Nietzsche's own answer to his nihilism, spoken by Zarathustra: "Now is that become thy final refuge which hath been hitherto thine extremest peril" (SQ, 125). Knight says that this refers to Powys's sadism, but I believe that this "extremest peril" is more pertinently understood as Powys's nihilism in which, particularly in the writing of *A Glastonbury Romance*, he found refuge, refuge and answer as enigmatic speech: an answer that shadows the enigmatic nature of the question. One can only speak of presences and exile enigmatically. It is precisely the enigmatic nature of speech (and writing) that forces one to the wager that there may be Something.

Endless talk. Enigmatic narrative. Narrative as the response to the guests at the door. Talk them down. A life of speech and writing. Powys's life.

An example of Powys's seemingly endless speech and writing—although it is writing *At The End*—is the very late *Up and Out* (1957, age 85), one of those late fantasies that I have had—until now—a hard time reading. This time it had its fascinations, partly because it holds out a position most clearly defined as "nihilistic." This I shall come back to later. At the beginning of *Up and Out*, Gor Goginog, the exiled speaker—exiled from a world first cut into fragments by vivisection and then blown apart by nuclear holocaust—this exiled speaker says that since his early years he had been "seized with a desperate mania for words: yes! for words as in their essential nature they really are, that is to say the expression of every kind of thought, emotion, feeling, sensation and idea that can possible enter from outside, or can possibly spring up from inside

any imaginable or conceivable living creature" (9). Gor had indeed spent his boyhood and young manhood

upon inventing a universal Western Language! It sounds crazy, and of course some of you will accuse me of playing the copycat to that invented language called Esperanto and even to the inspired author of 'Finnegan's Wake.' But any way my purpose was to mingle and mix up in one verbal paint-pot, or let us say upon one syllabic palette, all the most characteristically national and all the most local and idiomatic expressions in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, and Laplandish, and out of these multi-national composite sounds to create a lexiconic instrument through which the whole body, soul, and spirit of the men, women, and children of Europe could be expressed." (10)

Yes, of course, "Euro-logo-centrism," we may say. But let's bracket that problem for now and stay with the idea of the invention of a Universal Language. This would certainly not be any existing language, formed, as languages are, from religious, economic, military, metaphysical or psychological power. It will be a language of difference, and this language will overcome existing language. It is the will towards such a language that moves Gor Goginog of Blaenau-Ffestiniog to speak the magical words, "Up and Out," words that allow his survival, with his companion Rhitha, on the only portion of the earth left after the Big Bang (the final one, not the first one).

There are, you will remember, two other survivors, extraordinary, explicit, and perhaps understandable creations of an old man's imagination: the friendly monster Org and his winsome companion Asm. Gor Goginog is one in a succession of Powys's "Destroyers." Humanity has destroyed physical Space, and it is Gor Goginog's accomplishment aboard his own spaceship, the "G. G. Time Destroyer," to bring an end to time. This is a strange replication of William Hastings (from *Ducdame*, you remember) whose great design was to bring about universal suicide. *Up and Out* is, in fact, a strange replication of *Ducdame*. And there are connections to John Geard's words to John Crow about suicide as an affirmation of life. Here is Gor Goginog's great design: "Wouldn't the best retort to the self-elevating worshippers of Man as God, as

well as to the self-prostrating worshippers of God as Man, be simply and solely to obliterate at one stroke the whole of Creation? Then and then only and in that way alone would the brutal and blustering and blatant eulogists of this murderous life of ours be reduced to their proper place" (22). After this, who needs Nietzsche?

Strangely enough, *Up and Out* hardly lives up to the profound pessimism of its undertaking. It is saved by its "desperate mania for words." This folding-up of creation, which seems to imply closure, is in fact an unfolding. An unfolding into Nothing. This unfolding is the play, the *jouissance*, that pervades the text. This seems appropriate to a text in which one's closest, most constant, and likely most demanding companions are Org and Asm. But there is no doubt in my mind that this late work of actual and imaginative exile is moved by a spirit of nihilism, a spirit of nihilism—as the spirit of Destruction—that is a Presence in Powys's work. It is certainly a refuge. It is the spirit that Zarathustra declares in the succinct and foreboding: "The Human must be overcome." It is the foreboding and tragic play of Dionysus. Out of extreme peril comes refuge. (What happened to John Crow on the bridge named Peril?)

That Gor and Rhitha are exiles seems plain enough. They have left Wales, New York, Earth, Space, Time, Eternity, Nothing, and Being itself. I think it doubtful that even Non-Being (or West of West) remains. They witness the suicide of God and the Devil. Only a kind of meta-consciousness remains. They are nomads. They are nomads very much in the sense that Harald Fawcner uses the word, designating an "antimetaphysical mode of being," in his article on "Ontotheology" (*Powys Review* 21, 47). But it is to another reading, not I think a contrary one, that I wish to turn to now, to Gilles Deleuze's paper "Nomadic Thought," since it is this that takes us to Nietzsche and to our concern with language. Deleuze's paper is about style, about Nietzsche's style (especially about the aphorism). What I want to suggest is that this idea of nomadic style, nomadic writing, leads us into thinking about Powys's style, into thinking about the problems of narration, and the problems of narration in exile.

In the paper which gave this conference its title and its theme, I was thinking about Powys's narrator as a traveller, as, indeed, an alien, and if I had thought of the word nomad I would have used it. Obviously we are beyond the familiar and now discredited "author intrusion" approach to Powys's text: the idea that he spoke too much in his own voice. Powys never had "his own voice," that is to say a singular, or "centred," voice. We know that his lectures were performances. Theatricality was his mark. One ele-

ment of the lecture tour (or even gatherings of our various Societies) is that you can count on leaving town the next day, a kind of "Royal Nonesuch" that Mark Twain (himself an itinerant lecturer) made famous in *Huckleberry Finn*.

There is never a "certain" voice in Powysian narration. Absence of narrative certainty can be described stylistically as "perspectival." What Nietzsche's text, the nomadic text, offers is "the interpretive character of all that happens. No event exists in itself. Everything that happens consists of a group of phenomena that are gathered and selected by an interpretive being" (NN, Granier, 135 [quoted from Kröner, *Werke*, XIII, §158], see also Granier, NN, 194). This interpretive being I have called "the alien," and it may be called, in Fawcner's and Deleuze's words, "the nomad." This is the name of the narrator of Powys's fiction, of *Glastonbury* in particular. It accounts for other names as well. But, in *Glastonbury* it is also a characteristic of the persons who inhabit the text. Geard, Evans, John Crow, Matt and Sam Dekker, Mary Crow, Persephone Spear, Dave Spear, Paul Trent, Nancy Stickles, Angela Beere, the list goes on—each, for example, read and misread, the Grail from her or his own perspective. No single perspective offers "the truth." But the perspective that dominates the text is the narrator's, and it is important to read his text as only one more, albeit the most comprehensive, perspective. And there is no reason to accept it as "the truth," except that it is the truth of the other perspectives as they are disclosed. The interpretation of other interpretations. What we have, then, is an exile's story of exiles.

What are they exiled from? From the "Something" of which the Grail (or chalice, or cauldron, or cup, or valley, or hill—the Tor, we assume, is an inverted Grail) is an interpretation. Geard himself, that great, if fanciful, interpreter, cannot get beyond the "Something" at Glastonbury. In his sermon near the end, delivered while the flood waters rise, he invokes a Presence in each of us that "sinks down . . . into something, my dears, that is . . . something that is . . . is . . . the Blood and the Water and the . . ." Then he yawns, and says, still yawning, "Any questions for me, my dears?" (1138). An interpretation of "something" concealed, to be disclosed only by further questioning. Meaning will be deferred. The recognition of one's position in this chaos of interpretation is recognition not of a connection to an Origin but—conversely—a disconnection from it. The Origin is, and remains, concealed. This recognition identifies the position of the narrator. Such recognition is confirmed for us not by its truth, or its verisimilitude, its representational accuracy, or its creation of "life-like" characters, since these are illusions, but by its

creation of "life-like" characters, since these are illusions, but by its *rhetoric*, the rhetoric of the Nomad.

Nomad thought is identified not only by position in an actual or fictive world (marked by taking long walks, sea journeys, or railway trips across continents), but by rhetoric. Here we return to Nietzsche. In Deleuze's words, Nietzsche is the "first to conceive of the individual in the absence of all forms of codification—whether these be the 'fundamental bureaucracies' of state, family, law, contracts, institutions, conventional values, or even sanity itself" (NN, 132). These "fundamental bureaucracies" exist through language, and they will be overcome by language. This language of overcoming will reveal itself as a rhetoric of nihilism. In Deleuze's interpretation such rhetoric takes the form neither of "codes" nor representation, but the form of "intensity," and the specific form in Nietzsche's intense text is the aphorism, a rhetorical form whose validity as statement is not that it presents a verifiable truth but that it forces the reader into interpretation, into the very experience that the narrator or the author is undergoing in the act of writing. Here is the key passage on such writing from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Whoever writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read but to be learned by heart. In the mountains the shortest way is from peak to peak: but for that one must have long legs. Aphorisms should be peaks—and those who are addressed, tall and lofty. The air thin and pure, danger near, and the spirit full of joyful sarcasm: these go well together . . . courage wants to laugh" (TSZ, I, 7).

We can learn something from this about both John Cowper's and Theodore's styles, John's "rhapsodic" and Theodore's "mannerist" prose. Aphorisms break continuity, they claim space for reflection, for reflecting on the danger. In a world that wants "stories" it is no wonder at all that writers who insist on a kind of primordial engagement, who insist on danger, are set aside, missed. Aphoristic traversing is accompanied by an ironic disengagement: seriousness of purpose is countered persistently by charlatanism, and, if not by that, then by the preposterous, by, for example, Rabelais. Deleuze says that an "indescribable delight always springs forth from the great books, even when they present things that are ugly, desperate, or terrifying. As it is, all great books bring about a transmutation; they give tomorrow's health. One cannot help but laugh when the codes are confounded" (NN, 147). From these connections I shall attempt to suggest how we can use this procedure to enhance our sense of Powys's style, of how it is that meaning is conveyed in his text. Glen Cavaliero provides fine

insights into this style in his paper on Powys's "comic spirit," noting how he works through "intensity" and "sheer over-assertion" (10). Deleuze asks at the end of his paper on nomad thought "Who are our nomads today, our real Nietzscheans?" Allowing for a time warp, I include John Cowper Powys.

But Nihilism is still at the door.

Nihilism announces itself to a world without Presence. Those who accept this world and retain some strange obsession to find meaning—we shall call them "writers"—become aliens, nomads. Signs that had provided meaning by the Presence they contained must now be interpreted without the benefit of such Presence. The world presents itself like the Gorm signpost in *Ducdame*, one of Powys's most obviously nihilistic markers in one of his most nihilistic books. As we have seen, no one remembers what the sign meant, where the road to Gorm went, or indeed where Gorm was. But no one would deny its importance. It was the sign of Something. Signs accrue meaning, and this meaning must be confirmed, not by transcendental significance, but by repetition and rhetorical (stylistic) intensity. The narrative of a world without Presence must constitute itself out of its own force. What can this force be but a primordial desire to narrate? This describes Powysian narrative. This narrative is not only thematically directed towards the confounding of the codes, but it is stylistically offensive to the codes.

We could, in reading *Glastonbury*, concentrate on the passages that would, in common parlance, be called intrusive: "Mr. Powys enters too often into his story. Etc., etc., etc." Simplistically sketched out, 1) the narrator relates action, 2) the narrator comments on the psychological state of a character (characterization, we could say), 3) the narrator comments on the place of the action, the scene (setting, we could say, including "descriptions of nature" which are always in Powys part of the narrative), and 4) the narrator develops relationships between these elements. These are the elements of narration that develop an illusion of empirical circumstance.

But the narrator of *Glastonbury*, assuming a position that is at once outside and inside the action, characters and scenes, counters this empirical illusion. The narrator is himself a character in what is taking place, in the sense that he is the no mere teller of events, but their constant interpreter. He is very close to Melville's Ishmael, the outcast narrator of *Moby-Dick*. *Glastonbury* is, at least at one point, first-person narration.² This narrator is our alien, our Nomad. He is here, but he seems to be from somewhere else. Also, he has friends and acquaintances who know more than we do. The

narrator is thinking from the outside. He has, for example, access to the "Invisible Watchers" (when Mary sees the Grail, for example), and he knows about something called the First Cause. We can even say that he, like Wolf Solent, is obsessed with the First Cause (see Lock, "Polyphonic Powys," and Cavaliero). This narrator has a seemingly inexhaustible supply of meaning, none of it certain. This narrator speaks aphorisms and proclamations. We will not get very far by accepting such statements as "truth statements," or even statements whose content will offer us the philosophy of John Cowper Powys. G. Wilson Knight said that *Glastonbury* was not a book but a Bible, which means not that it contains doctrine, or even Presence, but that it is a source of infinite interpretation. These intrusions are part of a dialogue between narrator and reader, although some readers may mistake it for an assault. Perhaps they were not mistaken. As John Crow says: "There must be destruction" (383). Nomadic thought (and language) eradicates its own territory, otherwise it becomes dogma. This is one of John Crow's functions in the text. His involvement in Geard's project and in Evans's search for Esplumoeir (he tries to undermine these projects) is to prevent them from becoming permanent, from fossilizing. As a nihilist he clears the ground for new interpretation. This is the narrator's task, too.

This narrator, like John Crow and Wolf Solent, and, I believe, like John Cowper Powys himself, is "dis-eased"; he lives in two worlds. He is doubled. We have a narrative, then, of split personality. There danger lies, and life, and "tomorrow's health."³ We can describe this narration as a constant interplay between this world and the Gaze at this world, a Gaze given voice. The most obvious example is the voice given, by the narrator, to the "Invisible Watchers." What kind of connection does the narrator have with these Invisible Watchers? What do they do? What exactly is it in the sky over Glastonbury? They appear eight times, always at critical moments. They are sometimes present, but they are not Real Presences. They figure here the way the watchers do in Blake's prophetic books: they gaze, but they do not care. They shake their heads. *Glastonbury* for this one year at least (called, interestingly enough, "The Present") was under the Gaze, the look of perceptive but uncaring Others. Only the narrator—because of his "dis-ease"—has access to their Gaze, and their aphoristic pronouncements.

These Watchers must not be mistaken for the "Something" that is appealed to as "some" kind of Presence. There is no development in the concept of "Something." It seems to be there as

a memory of something forgotten, an Origin. But, as I have suggested, only the memory of an Origin remains, or, more challenging, only the memory that we have forgotten an Origin. There always seems to be something before. As for this Something, I thought I might try counting the "Somethings" in *Glastonbury*. I did not finish. But Geard, as we have seen, offers a last word on this: "something that is . . . is . . . the Blood and the Water and the . . ." Then he yawns, and says, "Any questions for me, my dears?" (1138).

When we look for Presence, there is, of course, the problem of the two-faced "First Cause." It offers Presence only in the sense of interminable struggle. It is certainly Manichean. And it is the narrator's fancy, something similar to Wolf's mythology and life-illusion. Here, too, is a problem: Wolf exorcises his life-illusion, but it comes back as the narrator's mythology in *Glastonbury*. (It is fanciful but perhaps not impertinent to think of Wolf Solent as the narrator of *Glastonbury*?) The First Cause is not used with any consistency in the text. It haunts the text, it is like a shadow in the text, perhaps like a guest at the door. An example that could be worked out in much more detail is Philip Crow's walk in the "Tin" chapter (692-94). We would be particularly concerned with the narrator's intrusion upon Philip's walk. This journey starts as a representation of events in Philip's mind. It does not stay in this mode for long. The direction of the meditation moves beyond the questions that we could possibly assign to Philip. Can we, for example, possibly assign to Philip the theory of writing set out in the passage? John Brebner uses this "Demon within" passage as the source of his title, and his interpretation of Powys. This "Demon within" is the "nomadic" writer, and is, I believe, a figure of the narrator. A similar, but more complex, affiliation takes place in the chapter "Nature Seemed Dead," in which the narrator interprets everyone's murderous dreams on the night of December 10th. The rhetorical repetition of the words "the night of December 10th" tells us to recognize the special intensity of this particular night. This intensity, this rhetoric of dis-ease, so often evoking "Something" (or "Watchers" or "Causes") as Presence, has a countering effect. Presences come and go, rise and fall, and they remain only in place as memory.

Loss of Presence is John Cowper Powys's "interpretation." This is to say that his reading of the world, of the Grail, of being in the world, and of Inheritance, is pervaded, organized, by the Loss of Meaning. But what gives his interpretation such power is that in "some" way the Human remembers the Loss. We recall, again, the dialogue between the red light of Real Presence and the empty tomb

of Joseph of Arimathea (134-35). These are sites of an emptied Presence. Yet strangely, they themselves retain some memory that they once had meaning, and that they belong to one another. Something has been there, or belonged there, that they cannot forget. They, along with Evans, Geard, Matt and Sam, wait.

The meaning that prevails in Powys is that we have forgotten something, something more than, say, an umbrella. This word, "Something," repeated so often, provides a meaning that we have with us, in our own present, only a trace of Real Presence, and that we shall never have any more than that. The Grail is only a memory, one of many memories—invented and degraded by human history—of something that has been forgotten. This departure of Real Presence—even "departure" is a metaphor, an invention—this departure of Real Presence has left a gap, an abyss, *the* abyss, that has been all too hastily filled by forces that claim Presence. Blake calls them the Usurpers: we may know them as sado-masochism, vivisection, the plundering of the body, racism, capitalism, communism, experimental science, development, religion, all the codes by which we organize and mutilate our lives.

Nihilism, as the recognition of false Presence, nihilism as the survivor ("I alone have lived to tell the tale"), nihilism forces remembrance. This is not a remembrance directed towards a discovery of Esplumoir, Utopia, the New Age, the Glastonbury Commune, or even the New Jerusalem. Nihilism forces a response which may, on the one hand, form itself as nostalgia: passive, malicious, resentful, deathly, the shadow of desire. Although it invents schemes to make life tolerable, it remains passive, weakly eccentric, self-defensive. On the other hand, such response may be an affirmation of whatever there is of remembrance, not with the purpose of recovering an Origin but of celebrating, in the face of the disappearance of Presence, the act of such disappearance. Its eccentricity is strong. To the face of danger, it says, "I accept you."

Powys takes us no further than the celebration of the disappearance of Presence. But that is far. *Up and Out*, a "book of annihilation," ends with such a celebration. To the passing of all things, of God, Devil, Org, Asm, even Rhitha, Gor Goginog invokes the Homeric "the same for all that." Like "up and out," these are magical words. This statement, this "the same for all that," coming as it does at the end of *Up and Out*, and near the closing of Powys's life of writing, has special significance for us. It resonates both with the Homeric acceptance of fate and the Nietzschean *Amor Fati*, love your fate. It is not a passive resignation to the unending recurrence of the same. It is an affirmation of what one did, what one does,

with a life that of its own offers no Real Presence. "Was that life? Well, then, once more!" And this "once more" is indeed the title of Zarathustra's final music, the round-dance, the roundelay, to which are invited all those exiles, those nomads, who led lives of confounding codes. Zarathustra spoke—speaks—for those who travel.

Who, then, is Powys's Nietzsche? And what, then, is Powys's nihilism? There are several choices. First, the "Neetchky" of the young man at Wollop's who found a justification for seducing young women. Second, the voice that spoke to John Crow (and William Hastings): "There must be destruction." Perhaps it is the voice that urged Geard towards suicide. Nietzsche knew that he would be read (mis-read) this way, that he might even bear responsibility for justifying the most nihilistic of all sentences, "Everything is permitted," words that haunt Owen Evans and Persephone Spear, and motivate Philip Crow, words that haunt our age. Third choice: the Nietzsche (and the nihilism) of *Ecce Homo*, a book we know Powys knew well, a book that says, in the absence of Presence, "become what you are," a book testifying to and affirming a life of writing, dis-ease, and exile. Powys, this nomadic and uncanny guest (and host), is at the door. He speaks. We listen. The turning of a page. The recognition of a word. A silence. And always: "Any questions for me, my dears?" ♦

Notes

¹This is a shortened version of a paper, under the same title, that I gave to the Powys Society (U.K.) in August 1990 in Cirencester, England. Nothing that was obscure there is plain here, although it is now inscribed for the Gaze of those who wish to look. I have not tried, or even found it possible, to eradicate all the elements of a "delivered" paper, but I have tried to set out areas for continued exploration, particularly the margins that mark out the boundaries between the writer's texts and the "life of writing." Let me extend my gratitude to Morine Krissdottir for asking me to speak to the Society. It was, in so many ways, a splendid conference.

²The connections between Powys and Melville have been pointed out before. Charles Lock notes in his *Weymouth Sands* article: "(Melville is always near to Powys)" (32). Peter Powys Grey quite some time ago, and with his usual enthusiasm, convinced me of the relation, and he just recently alerted me to an extremely interesting book review of *The Enjoyment of Literature* that Thomas Merton (later

to become a Trappist monk) wrote in 1938: "From the first pages of the introduction the reader notices the similarity of Mr. Powys' style to Herman Melville's, and, indeed, in his essay on Melville the author claims to be a 'congenital disciple of the particular kind of imagination, both mystic and realistic, both monstrous and grotesque, that was so natural to Melville'" (467). The "I" narrator is noted by Charles Lock in his "Polyphonic Powys" article. I am indebted to James Ryan for his research into the complex figure of *Glastonbury's* narrator (*A Paradigm of "Knowings": Narrative Control in Selected Works of John Cowper Powys*, M. A. thesis, Carleton University, 1984).

³In this matter of the divided figures and voices of Powys's narration, I found Ernst Verbeek's paper delivered at the Cirencester conference, "John Cowper Powys: Tempting the Gods," to be particularly enlightening and helpful.

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The American Scene and Character

A Resident Alien to Alien Critics

John Cowper Powys

[Editor's note: "The American Scene and Character" first appeared in *The Century Magazine* for December 1927. The *Century* had long been a major presence on the North American journalistic scene, a rival to *Harper's* and *The Atlantic* in reaching an educated, middlebrow audience. During the late 1880s, under Richard Watson Gilder's editorship, its circulation peaked at 200,000. "Four Brothers—A Family Confession," Powys's previous contribution to the *Century*, was published in September 1925, about the time that Glenn Frank resigned as editor to become President of the University of Wisconsin. Frank was the *Century's* last successful editor. By 1930, a year after "The American Scene and Character," the magazine's circulation had slumped to 20,000—whereupon it faded out.

Even though it appeared in a moribund journal, "The American Scene and Character" struck home with many readers. It was reprinted in at least three collections, *Challenging Essays in Modern Thought* (1933), *Essays of Today: 1926-27* (1928), and *Prose Patterns* (1933). As the titles of these volumes indicate, they stand halfway between two genres familiar still today: the collection of prize essays and the freshman anthology. "The American Scene and Character" became a chestnut, a "Once More to the Lake" or "Politics and the English Language" of its time.

The essay has a broader significance also. Not only is it an excellent evocation of JCP's sense of the continent, gained on his lengthy and exhausting lecture-tours, it is equally, I think, an answer to Henry James's writings on America. Though Powys does not mention James here, the title of his essay suggests a connection—as does a bit of half-forgotten historical context. In the *Dial* (an "advanced" magazine for which Powys wrote much more regularly than he did for the culturally middle-of-the-road *Century*), Van Wyck Brooks

published a lengthy and influential critique, "Henry James: The American Scene" (July 1923). Brooks highlights James's dissatisfaction with the thinness and provinciality of American society. "America, to James, signified failure and destruction." Powys in the *Century* (which decades before had published James's *The Bostonians*!) makes a strikingly different argument than the one discerned—and severely critiqued—by Brooks. Powys's "American Scene" and James's *American Scene* might almost be understood as inversions, mirror images: each the work of an emigrant justifying his presence in a strange land, a land which was home to the other.]

When I read certain vindictive strictures on America, wherein one philosophic observer after another analyzes human life in this country to such disparaging result, I feel a longing to make some sort of a reply. Like all "strangers within the gates" I have had my shocks and my malicious reactions; but these experiences, granting them freely their due place, have left a margin, a borderland, of something else, about which it would seem ungrateful to hold my tongue. I think that the worst things in this country are emphatic and imposing, the best things imponderable and fluid; and for that reason any adequate answer to these old-world criticisms must go to work in a subtle indirect manner and deal in nuances and intimations rather than in downright indignant retorts.

And, after all, is not this in itself the best retort that could be made? Against these point-blank accusations that the American Scene exercises a sinister influence upon human civilization, is it not the most penetrating apologia we could make use of, to throw into relief just those intangible things that touch most intimately the life of the spirit, indicating them here, and again there, dispersed through the whole chaotic spectacle? Yes, and not only indicating them; showing the effect of these finer fragilities, these aspects of American life that are less solid than bricks and mortar, less obvious than bridges and railroads, upon at least one old-world mind.

A "resident alien" like myself whose profession carries him into every part of the country feels as he reads books such as the recent ones by Joad and Siegfried that these attacks are much easier to make than to answer. It does not suffice to enumerate certain outstanding advantages which America possesses over all other quarters of the globe; advantages that no indictments can shake. Over these the more intangible felicities ebb and flow and waver, like clouds of midges above a powerful life-giving stream.

The solid advantages can be quickly summed up. Such is

the indulgence women enjoy and their unrestricted self-expansion; such are the economic opportunities for the masses of the unprivileged; such are the endless labor-saving and health-preserving scientific inventions; such is the thinning out of those "armies of the homeless and the unfed" that poison the wells of life for all; such is the airy buoyancy and gaiety—in spite of all its devastating extremes of heat and cold—of the atmospheric climate of this continent.

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Commenting upon the most obvious of these solid advantages, let me say at once that while we foreigners detect plenty of limitations to *democracy* along political and economic lines we are compelled to do unstinted honor to what it offers in the purely human and social field.

Many a rough shock at first does the educated European receive! I remember well what I felt when my leisurely patronizing tone—that peculiar class-conscious tone of Englishmen abroad—was received on all sides by amused indulgence. I remember what I felt when I was first addressed as *a man* rather than as *a gentleman*. "This *man* wants so-and-so"; "Here's a *man* saying so-and-so"; "Give the *man* back his seat, honey." By degrees however as I was buffeted into accepting my essential status quo, just *Anthropos Erectus* among other anthropoids, I came to recognize what a great moral advance had been made in this particular. Reconciled to being a *man*, it was more difficult to slip naturally into the role of being a *guy*. "This *guy* wants his ticket"; "Here's a *guy* kicking about his seat." But even this has almost come now to seem no real derogation from primitive human courtesy.

It is not only women in America who benefit by this large equality. Young people, over here, of both sexes are given an indulgence and a consideration which is an absolutely new thing upon the face of the earth. The children of Manhattan, for instance—who can forget the audacity with which they bathe in prohibited fountains and burn bonfires under the very noses of the police? Those street bonfires have always seemed to me a brave symbol of the achieved freedom of youth in this country. How the little imps dance round them! And, to my mind at least, this fire-dance of the New York children is sufficient evidence that an atmosphere exists here less disciplined by the bureaucratic "verbotens" of organized paternalism, whether imperial or Fascist or communist, than anywhere else in the world.

One other commentary I would like to make on these solid advantages. Is the amazing power of public opinion over here to be included among these superiorities? This public opinion in America is, it seems to me, a psychic phenomenon which cuts both ways. Led by the press, and reflected in the press, it does sometimes put an end to abominable evils, but more often—one has to admit it—it sets itself to hunt down and destroy that free expression of individual genius upon which the life of our race depends.

On the other hand, over against this, it must be allowed that endless "queer ones," up and down this chaotic country, can live and die in their own extraordinary by-paths and back-waters, unnoticed, unspecified, uncatalogued; persons who, on the other side, would be smoothed out and pruned and trimmed and polished by the pressure of some little group or coterie or class. The feelings of such eccentrics in America must I suppose be more flagrantly outraged, their loneliness must be more acute, than would be the case abroad; but if they do manage to put forth their blossoms, like seedling peach-trees in Middle Western dooryards, they display a strange and spontaneous quality, the beauty of original sensitiveness thrown into sharp relief against the primordial waste of the landscape.

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No doubt one of the great misunderstandings about Americans is due to the "protective coloring" with which people who do not fit into the standardized verdicts of their community evade the detection of their peculiarities. In England—with the weight of his class behind him—a man can be as eccentric as he pleases. It is indeed his joy and delight to assert his idiosyncrasies. English individuality therefore protrudes itself and fortifies itself where American individuality hides itself; but you have only to scratch one of these citizens and you'll find a prickly philosopher.

But, as I have suggested, over and above these obvious benefits to humanity of the American Scene there hover a thousand nuances of delicate intimation, which in my own opinion are of far rarer, far finer significance. But one has to wander like an old-fashioned "bagman," up and down all manner of out-of-the-way quarters of this country, playing the Quaker and waiting patiently upon the Spirit, to catch these more subtle flavors of the confused hurly-burly.

How, for instance, can the ways of such a continent be as inimical as these critics hint to the nobler motions of the soul when a

man can wake up as I have done on many a Sunday morning in the most flagrant of all American cities, New York itself, and listen to the silence in the cool-blowing summer air, while the wind rustles the ailanthus leaves at the window, lifting them up and letting them fall like undulating seaweed in a vast green rock-pool? Sunday mornings in America are indeed halcyon seas of luxurious quiescence to any one wakeful enough to be conscious of their peace. There is no deeper calm to be found in the depths of the ocean, in the heart of the desert. It is a psychic calm, produced by the relaxation of the quivering nerves of the most electric of all peoples. Such nerves when they do relax, relax to a level of abysmal somnolence unparalleled elsewhere, and out of these "fields of sleep" if the cool wind still blows what friendly sounds reach the ear! The echoing hoofs of the milkmen's horses, the siren-calls from the river, bringing rope smells and tar smells and the splash of waves at port-holes and the glittering, rocking sun-path to the horizon's rim, the twitter of sparrows, the murmur of pigeons—all these sounds as they come to us here, no less than anywhere else on the earth's surface, have the friendliness of those faint race-memories that Wordsworth loved to note as they came and went.

But it is the silence itself on these Sunday mornings rather than any sound, rather even than the mass bell from St. Joseph's or the bell-buoy in the river, that seems to be the sleep of the great, taut, tense city, relaxed at last, taking her fill of "deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill." That wave-washed mountain of delicate towers, what may be its multitudinous, its Atlantean dream? Millions of sleepers, in apartment houses, in tenement houses, in old doomed Dutch houses, under the spans of iron bridges, under the pillars of iron rails, lie horizontal and unconscious now, indrawn into the great cosmic diastole. Over it all the slippery sea-gulls sway and slide and are suspended. Over it all the white clouds journey, intent on voyages unknown to thought; over it all shiver those invisible air-waves that rise and fall forever through space, linking life to the secret causes of life.

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I repeat once more—the essential spirit of America, its real contribution to civilization, is a psychic quality intimately associated with the geography of the continent, and far more involved with mystic nuances of feeling than with the making of Arrow Collars, Chevrolets, caskets, plow-shares, chewing-gum, kodaks, dynamite and steel-rails.

Factories enough, industries enough, the traveler sees, from the old Dutch villages of New York State, through the small towns lost in the rich dark loam-lands of the Middle West, to the inhuman fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains; but these Mills of Progress no more really dominate human character in these places—its drifting resilience, its humorous patience—than they dominate the cosmogonic landscape which engulfs them.

For between this landscape and this character there has grown up a psychic reciprocity older than any science. What those old Indians breathed in from the earth-spirits of this land—an evasive sensitiveness in womankind, a rooted withdrawnness in mankind—can still supply its fluidity and its reserve to the modern mind that waits upon its spirit.

Americans themselves, isolated in particular portions of their native land, are ready enough to defend their predilection for New England or the Far West or the Old South; but what a wanderer like myself cannot help noticing is that the quality I speak of can be found in a measure everywhere you go, found in the most diverse places, be they prairie or desert, be they pastoral uplands or the littered debris of city environs.

The thing I am thinking of, with its blending of human and natural elements is what Walt Whitman had in mind when he used the term "*calamus-root*" to express the spirit of his democracy of the wild, of his camaraderie of the waste.

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I have caught this "*genius loci*" of America, so furtive, so shy, many times off-guard and exposed. I have caught it in the upper reaches of the Hudson, when islands of green reeds and greener willows, backwaters of blue coolness and bluer irises, have broken through the mists of dawn.

I have caught it with a pang of capricious nostalgia, even in New York itself, when the name "*Marion, Ohio*," upon a crane-shovel has brought in a flash to my mind that Acadian perspective of names, Bellefontaine, Greencastle, Terre Haute, leading out of the metallic labyrinth of Manhattan, like the milestones of a highroad, into solitudes of frame-houses, picket-fences, cows, chickens and red barns of the Middle West!

I have caught it above the muddy banks of the Mississippi where the city of St. Louis plants itself with four-square solidity, the richly gathered masses of the separate buildings rolling up, mounting up together ledge upon ledge, tier upon tier, as if

inclosed, like the cities of old, by walls and ramparts—now seen all confusedly and vaguely imminent, through its own atmosphere of heavy smoke, penetrating all its interstices, the dusky pall of its identity!

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I have always felt that there was something "rich and strange" and dimly formidable about St. Louis; and so apparently did the crowds at Le Bourget! Has not this city turned out to be the palpable fulfilment of that weird prophecy of Leonardo, quoted by Paul Valery? "The great bird will take its first flight on the back of its great swan, filling the universe with stupor" and bringing "*gloria eterna al nido dove nacque*"—"eternal glory to the nest where it was born!"

What aplomb, full of old long sun-baked siestas of forgotten Congo dreaming, do those St. Louis negroes show, sprawling on creaking balconies, hunched up on rusty fire-escapes—great savage athletic bodies in flimsy modern clothes but with bare black feet, and women whose immense ebony faces seem to expand into the inhuman contours of idols between their jangling gilded earrings!

That wide steep declivity of slippery cobblestones descending to the water's edge—cobblestones not green with weeds or brown with mud, but of a forlorn phantasmal gray worthy of the very wharf of Lethe!

And those vast outlandish riverboats, whose winter quiescence has all the indescribable melancholy that belongs to old deserted woodwork, rain-soaked and sun-bleached—the timber-life fled out of it and a sinister wraith-life entered into it instead!

All these things have something about them that passes from Nature to Humanity; and back again from Humanity to Nature.

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I recollect finding myself once in Fargo, North Dakota, at a time when the great plains would naturally have been constricted under frozen snow. In place of this, long before her time, a strange uprising of the Spring Goddess had occurred. The atmosphere was full of a power that was like the presence of invisible flowing sap. The languid noonwinds seemed to carry on their breasts clouds of such impregnated balminess that one felt as though there were green shoots up there in the air.

I recollect skipping several paces down one of those long "dirt" roads in sheer childish happiness. Nor was this feeling lessened when, in the very lumber-yard of the freight-station I came upon the stone image of some early Viking settler, mildly receptive to that relaxing warmth, and close to this monument an old Dakotan who, himself like some decrepit Eric the Red, uttered the words: "I feels growth abroad, mister!"

Easy enough is it to pour forth pseudo-cultured abuse upon the thousands of prairie-lost "Main Streets" between Kansas City and Omaha. For civilization to "burn with a hard gemlike flame" it must undoubtedly have its roots in the deep past and its wavering decisions at some vital "parting of the ways"; but there are other moods, other conscious moments, other visions of the world which have also their human value. Life goes on, whether a man associates or does not associate his plowing and sowing, his business and barter, his loves and his frustrations, with the Greeks and the Romans, with the theology of the Middle Ages, with the philosophy of the Renaissance! Grant that the intellectual continuity of the ages is broken, there is a primitive poetry of life, simple and natural, like the life of the aboriginals themselves, where the smoke rises from unlettered hearths and the corn is cooked and eaten on platters virginal of all esthetics. Men's thoughts can sink into themselves with a more earthy taciturnity, women's feelings can gather an ampler largeness, a freer grandeur, where they are not teased and fretted by the insidious pressure of these layers upon layers, strata upon strata, of old sophistries.

And in this life of bed-rock simplicity one psychic quality profoundly essential to all great vision is not lacking, and that is a limitless *intellectual humility*. I have always regarded "humility" as the most creative inheritance of spiritual Christian culture; and when I think of the banked-up conceit of intelligent Europeans, so opaque to the free flow of new ideas, I cannot help recognizing that in the possession of this quality alone Americans release a hope of immense moment, not only for their own future but for that of other races as well.

When I have sometimes wandered at nightfall past the huge brazen boots and brazen trousers, past that tragically woeful countenance, of the Barnard statue of Lincoln in Cincinnati, I have known well enough that I was face to face with a spiritual emanation from all these dusty highways and "boardwalk" hamlets

such as was a sufficient answer to the sophisticated accusations of the old world. But not an obvious answer! An answer rather, dependent upon what one has observed, round the Franklin stove in many a remote Arkansas hostelry, in many a wayside Missouri station. Something coming and going on these sad prairie-winds, something advancing and retreating with these drenching rains and burning suns, a breath, a rumor, a movement in the air, a stir in the grass, a whisper over the wooded fences, a wild-goose cry above the tethered buggies in the meager squares, indicates to one old-world mind at least that the human spirit can find grist for its mill in a land where "Ben Hur" represents romance and the Bible represents philosophy!

And the value of what might be called the American "quota" to the psychic ascent of the human race springs from the present situation. For here are all those "mechanical improvements" with regard to the effect of which on human character sages are so suspicious. But here between these vast horizons and these staggering inventions the denizens of these multitudinous little country towns continue to live out their lives in almost Biblical simplicity. In such places there are no class divisions, no sophisticated vices. A spontaneous humanism such as would have delighted the soul of Rousseau himself answers to the clearness and freshness of the freeblowing airs. Hard-worked men and women seem to have energy enough left for an active friendliness such as makes the ingrown suspiciousness of old-world countrysides seem mean and bitter. It must be of this sort of primordial simplicity combined with hygienic science that Americans think, when in Berlin, Paris or Rome they cry aloud for their "home-town."

But if they are women perhaps they have an even more definite homesickness. For the feminine influence in American culture is quite a new thing in the world, so it seems to me, and a thing of extraordinary interest. The truth is that the *timbre* of masculine activities in this vast country is still attuned to the pioneer note; so that through all their politics and business and camaraderie there is that rough, untidy, adventurous casualness which men naturally assume when left to themselves.

And, except among professional students, the tougher "he-men" as they call them—the word itself is suggestive of what I am describing—are content to leave culture pretty much in the hands of their "womenfolks." The result of this seems to be that all over this country the feminine attitude to life has invaded fiction and poetry and the decorative arts to an extent unparalleled in human history. And this feminine attitude is far less cramped and cynical

and flippant than the attitude of a great deal of European literature. Not that it is in the least sentimental or banal. The poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay, of Elinor Wylie, of Lola Ridge, holds its own with the best on the other side; while the fiction of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Martha Ostenso, Zona Gale, Ellen Glasgow, drives straight deep honest furrows through the heart of many a mysterious field of human feeling quite remote from the experiences of the old world.

The casualness, the litter, the toughness, the pioneer chaoticism of the "he-man's" America finds its esthetic expression in Theodore Dreiser's work. But there is also a new group of "super-sophisticates," mostly young men, poets and critics, like E. E. Cummings and Edmund Wilson, who seem to combine the psychic imagination of this vast fluctuating crowd of women with a sharp witty rigorous attempt to turn into a kind of mocking beauty those aspects of modern American life such as radio, jazz, prize-fighting, aeroplanes, circuses, futurist patterns of steel and iron, streams of consciousness, "claviluxes" of color, which poise themselves like a phantasmagoric mist of acrobatic shapes, on a high stretched tight-rope, raised aloft above both masculine activity and feminine emotion.

■

This silly parrot-cry about Americans' love of money ought to be answered; and the way I shall answer it will seem to many Europeans a monstrous paradox in the face of the aggressive possessiveness and the resonant social "climbing" of the very rich and the *nouveaux riches* in this country. But it must be remembered that the vast majority of Americans are neither very rich nor *nouveaux riches*; any more than they are class-conscious "proletarians." They are that completely new thing in the history of our race, which one can only simply call American and leave it at that. Struggle for money they certainly do—day in, day out—but it is not, as it is with us Europeans, for the sake of the palpable benefits that money brings that they make it so fast and furiously. We Europeans treasure it because it brings social prestige, attractive possessions, and above all leisure. But the American pursues money for the sake of one of the craziest, vaguest, fantasticaest *ideas* that has ever entered a rational brain. He pursues it for the sake of what might be called "power-in-the-abstract," an idealistic, subjective, cerebral thing; a dream in fact without substance, without habitation, an "airy nothing," a floating will-o'-the-wisp!

This is why Americans who are making money leave their

landscape, their houses, their streets, their gardens, their very automobiles, so littered, untidy and ramshackle. They are pursuing something that is a fantastic ideal. And how is this ideal of the average small-town citizen to be metaphysically defined? I suspect that if we really could get to the essence of it, this tedious European tag about the Almighty Dollar would be proved the fallacy it is.

Well! Is not this "power-in-the-abstract" something parallel to the quests for intellectual truth, for esthetic beauty, for sensual pleasure as we know them in the old world? Average Americans are as completely devoid of any epicurean "art of life" as were the monks of the Thebaid! They have no taste for these things, no interest in them. Gourmands, virtuosos in meat and drink, hardly exist in America. Still less are Americans misers. What money represents to them is something thinner than a ghost, less ponderable than a cloud. It is not even power in the European sense of that word that they are after—not power, that is to say, over people, over things, over the destinies of nations. It is, as it were, the Platonic idea of power—power for *its own sake*, or if you will, the diffused potentiality of power; the sense of being in a position to experience all human experiences; to give every form of privilege, every form of knowledge, every form of adventure, what they would call the "once over." It is in pursuit of this intangible Quest that, like so many standardized Don Quixotes they "post over land and sea," traveling—often with their whole families—not only from Salisbury Cathedral to the Parthenon, but from Mobile to Omaha and from Omaha to Detroit; while, for all their fantastic ideal of being *au courant* with every level of human *savoir-faire* from Dan to Beersheba, they leave their littered country and return to their littered country with no more palpable possession "added unto them" than as if some airy mirage, some Fata Morgana had been luring them on.

For, deep down, out of sight of the vision of any European critic, there emerges from the subconsciousness of millions of quiet Americans a strange and mystic restlessness. There is quizzical humor about this restlessness. It is not discontented or morbid. But it is at the extreme opposite pole from anything materialistic or self-satisfied. It is a sort of psychic answer to some drifting whisper from the cosmos itself—flowing in from the unknown—prophesying incredible happenings. It is an abandonment, at once proud and humble, to some occult pressure in the air whirling up from the immense untamed landscape like a spiritual typhoon, a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night, tornadoing forward in

vast windy spirals toward the Uncreated.

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What these European critics fail to discern are not only the Lares and Penates of cities as different from one another as New Orleans, Indianapolis and San Francisco, giving each of them its own secret "genius," but the projected auras of the mass of isolated villages stretching from coast to coast. In these frost-bitten, sun-baked outposts of Progress, there exist, between the "false fronts" of the ramshackle "stores" and the boarded "sidewalks," quaint indurated characters whose crusty humors, unrevealed to a Sinclair Lewis, would still delight the soul of a Laurence Sterne or a Charles Lamb. The visitor from England or France, who knows such people at home, naturally sees nothing of them in hotels and Pullmans, and he returns to write his indictment of America from his impression of a handful of big buildings that could be hidden in one little fold of the Rocky Mountains or lost behind sand-hills in the smallest of Arizona ranches!

But the supreme mistake made by the European psychologist in summing up the American character is the mistake of assuming that the superficial braggadocio of this polyglot people is anything but skin-deep. In one generation from his incoming a strange new reserve establishes itself in the nature of an immigrant; a reserve that underlies all his *brio* and all his effusive slang. This is the primitive reserve of America. This is the mood of the high cheekbones and caustic lips of the old aboriginals. And it is a reserve that is totally concealed from the "reserved" Englishman and the ironic Frenchman—concealed by the engaging candor and oratorical pedantry of the men who hide it! Sometimes I dream that it is a reserve concealed even from its own possessors. But, such as it is, it shares its secret with the astounding natural features of the land that evokes it. If American *culture* has a vaporous fluidity which it derives from its emancipated *womanhood*, American *character* has a rooted withdrawnness which it derives from its overworked manhood. Whatever may be felt about a civilization that combines such elements, the present writer cannot conceal his premonition that, in Walt Whitman's quaint and characteristic jargon, "divine things well-enveloped" are likely to be its issue. ♦

Powys Modernist

A New Anthology on John Cowper Powys, reviewed by Glen Cavaliero

In the Spirit of Powys, New Essays. Denis Lane, ed., London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, pp. 268. £26.50.

Eighteen years have passed since the appearance of the collection of essays about John Cowper Powys which was edited by Belinda Humfrey and published by the University of Wales. It was based on the then justified assumption that Powys's work was still insufficiently known and his achievement unrecognized; it aimed to redress the balance by a series of essays covering the whole span of his work in fiction; and it also included letters and reminiscences which served as an introduction to the man himself. Denis Lane's compilation, on the other hand, can presume that Powys is widely known—or at least heard of—and accordingly devotes itself to a less explanatory, more confident approach towards establishing his centrality as a major writer in the Modernist tradition.

That note is sounded clearly in the essay by Charles Lock on Powys's connections with James Joyce, whom John Cowper never met but whose writings he consistently championed. Lock's own current work as Powys's biographer lends authority to the account of his subject's response to *Ulysses*, and substance to his contention that the two novelists are fittingly discussed in relation to each other. In this Lock is developing a line taken in J.M. McGann's interesting and perceptive Foreword, which observes also that Powys brought to Modernism "the one sign of contradiction it could not bear to face"—his "commitments and debts to writers who were hopelessly retrograde." It is an acute observation, more evidently true in the past than it is now. Lock quotes extensively from Powys's lesser known writings of the early period, and stresses the confidence of his self-identification with Proust and Joyce when he had himself as yet published nothing of significance.

Nine of the twelve essays focus on five of the six major novels. The omission of any extended discussion of *Owen Glendower*

is frustrating, because this book divides Powys's critics more than most, and has certain qualities of tragic heroic grandeur which qualify any assessments based on the more comedic novels. The fact that Powys himself appears to speak of it less often and with less affection than he does of *A Glastonbury Romance* or *Porius* raises certain questions as to its relative impersonality which might have been usefully treated here. What Michael Ballin says of *Porius*, that there is "a continuous process of transition from the death of the old to the rebirth of the new," applies rather differently to the case of *Owen*, which has an epic quality that consorts uncomfortably with assertions of Powys's concern with recurrence and circularity. It is his one novel to lay stress on mutability and the eroding effects of time.

The essays on *Wolf Solent* by Patrick Samway and Denis Lane focus on narratology and imagery respectively. The former's discussion of the role played by Urquhart's *History of Dorset* relates to Ballin's remarks about Powys's philosophy of history; both contribute to our understanding of the place of intertextuality in the novels and their concern with fictiveness, Samway's being the more theoretical of the two. Denis Lane's more traditional approach allows him to demonstrate Powys's "fictional method of integrating landscape and character, nature and mind"; a footnote here draws deserved attention to Carole Coates's earlier discussion of this theme in what remains one of the most satisfactory accounts of this most debatable novel. Lane's own account is in conformity with it, and highlights that elementalism which for many reasons is the book's most memorable aspect. Such close textual investigation makes it abundantly clear that Powys is a great writer, not merely an original or interesting one, if only because the diversity of readings which his work can sustain is seemingly endless—a fact still further evident in the recently published collection of essays on *Wolf Solent* edited by Belinda Humfrey.

A Glastonbury Romance, for all its spread, is in certain respects a simpler novel than its predecessor, less dense and multi-layered, more diffuse. Ben Jones, avoiding the dangers of a simplifying overview, concentrates on the use of the word "Esplumecoir" in the novel, not so much in terms of its esoteric significance as by tracing its narrative function in order to interpret one peculiar aspect of the novel's structure; he concludes that "the motif, read polyphonically, explains the series of transformations and disappearances and it provides the narratorial repetition that gives the novel its monumental cohesiveness." Jones's essay is a good example of how the reading of Powys's novels has benefitted

from the waning of the liberal humanist tradition, with its insistence on the propriety of a monologic authorial presence. Just as one now appreciated the many-layered texture of *Wolf Solent*, so also the harmonious diversity and narratorial relativities of *Glastonbury* become more evident, to the novel's great advantage.

Thomas Southwick's approach relies on biographical relationships and a close textual scrutiny that not only results in some instructive comments on the workings of Powys's prose style, but also permits him an illuminating comparison with Conrad. Another one occurs in Peter Christensen's essay on the connection between Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* and *Maiden Castle*. His treatment of this subject takes full account of earlier comments on the influence of Lawrence on Powys, and is a further contribution to the establishment of the latter's proper place among his literary contemporaries. *Maiden Castle* is also discussed by Margaret Moran: these essays, when coupled with the recent printing of Ian Hughes's edition of the full text, establishes the claim of that novel no longer to be considered the least as well as the last of the so-called Wessex quartet. Moran develops the theme of fictiveness as it is worked out in the novel to illuminate the still vexed problem of its interpretation. What she says relates interestingly to the pieces by Lane and Samway: one can watch a consensus of critical perspectives emerging.

If *Owen Glendower* is scanted, *Porius* is the subject of two essays. In "The Lie of the Land," Richard Maxwell argues forcefully against the popular view that Powys is a retrogressive, obsessed with the sense of place; he establishes that there is a dynamic working within the novel itself. Michael Ballin concentrates on Powys's ideas concerning history and civilization, and both essays argue for the contemporary relevance of this novel, and against its being regarded merely as an anachronistic curiosity. The fact that they both draw on the Colgate manuscript of the full text makes it all the more desirable that the latter should be published: Powys's reputation depends on the availability of one of his greatest masterpieces in its untruncated form.

Three essays differ rather markedly from the rest. That by Wilson Knight is the last he wrote, and contains some acute comments on Theodore and Llewelyn Powys as well as on John Cowper. (A slightly different version appears in *Visions and Vices*, a collection of Knight's more recent work on Powys, published in London by Cecil Woolf.) He focuses on the nature of death and on spiritualistic experiences, and is rather moving in his directness and unselfconscious spontaneity. Knight, like Powys himself, has a

quality of alert innocence that makes one think of William Blake (but John Cowper Powys was the more wily, complex and sophisticated of the two).

F.W. Fawcner's essay amounts to a complementary epilogue to his book, *The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys*, and is no less provocative and stimulating. In relating Powys's thought and artistry to the contemporary philosophical concern with the concept of non-being, he brings him into the post-Modernist era, offering a generalized, selective reading of the texts which contrasts with the more closely focused attention to literary detail shown by his fellow contributors. Indeed, Fawcner provides a valuable corrective here, for he reminds one of the evangelistic quality of Powys's writing, and, for all his idiosyncrasies and arcane vocabulary, is in spirit closer to those who value Powys as much for his philosophy as for his novels.

The other differentiated essay is that by Anthony Low on *Weymouth Sands*. While no less scholarly than are the others (though Mrs Lily's Christian name gets Frenchified from Hortensia to Hortense), it seems more consciously a work of literary art, with a style of considerable grace. Its method is that of descriptive analysis; but Low does not leave his treatment of the book at that, going on to argue cogently for Powys's relevance to the Modernist tradition. He too cites Conrad as a point of comparison, and argues that *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* are in fact providing critical perspectives similar to those afforded by *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Agent*. He moves with ease from the particular to the general.

What emerges conclusively from this collection as a whole is that Powys is a less marginal and eccentric figure than has often been supposed. This is the burden of essays as diverse in subject matter and tone as are those of Lock and Low, Moran and Fawcner. Indeed, the very changes in critical procedure that have come about in the past fifteen years have served John Cowper Powys well: a greater flexibility of approach leads, paradoxically, to an awareness of how deliberate his artistry and intentions were. The extraordinary density of his imagination under that so deceptively sprawling style grows the more mysterious as detailed concentration on specific texts exposes their range and relevance. Earlier defences of his work—or strictures upon it—now seem largely beside the point. The wealth of interpretation to be found in these essays is itself evidence of the advantage Powys enjoyed in coming to his maturity of literary expression so late. His novels, so spontaneously readable in their carefree prodigality of learning and wealth of reflective observation, establish a reciprocal relationship with their attentive

critics.

Clearly these critics have written about what interested them most: one may regret the fact that both early and late work has been left out of account, but not deplore it. In any case, Richard Maxwell's essay in the fall 1990 *Powys Notes* does much to restore the unjustly neglected *Atlantis* to its true place in the canon. Those interested in following through the discussion of such themes as "imagery," "thresholds" or "narrative procedures" will be helped by a most helpfully organized index. Only the title of the collection is a shade misleading, suggesting a vaguer, more meditative approach than one gets here. In view of the thrust of nearly all the arguments put forward, should not these essays have collectively proclaimed their conviction under the banner heading of John Cowper Powys: Modernist? ♦

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Powys Progressive

A cornucopia of books on JCP, reviewed by Denis Lane

Belinda Humfrey, ed., *John Cowper Powys' Wolf Solent: Critical Studies* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 229 pp. \$49.00. Distributed by Books International Inc., P.O. Box 6096, McLean, VA 22106.

G. Wilson Knight, *Visions and Vices: Essays on John Cowper Powys*, John D. Christie, ed. (London: Cecil Woolf, 1990), 155 pp. £14.95.

Anthony Head, ed., *Powys to a Japanese Friend: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Ichiro Hara* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1990), 160 pp. £14.95.

Paul Roberts, ed., *Powys to the Trovillions: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Hal. W. and Violet Trovillion* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1990), 121 pp. £14.95.

Belinda Humfrey, founding editor of *The Powys Review* and guiding force behind several collective studies of John Cowper Powys, now adds to her credentials with her editing of essays by herself and others on Powys's *Wolf Solent*. This, the first "casebook" on a Powys novel, offers diverging interpretations of the work that marked, by most accounts, the beginnings of Powys's maturity as an artist. Each of the essays here presented offers full and ample argument for bringing this immensely powerful yet somewhat sated novel back into print.

Humfrey's own essay, "Wolf Solent: Designs, Writing, Achievement," is a fine piece of investigative criticism offering a view of the novel as an artifact, a fiction, whose design emerged from an apparently serendipital convergence of Powys's intentions as author and the spirited assistance of his soul-mate, Phyllis Playter. Drawing judiciously upon documentary detail found in the

unpublished letters of John Cowper to Phyllis, Humfrey shows how Phyllis performed the role of primary editor for *Wolf Solent* and that John Cowper apparently surrendered to her decisions willingly and readily, re-writing at her suggestion entire sections and, in at least one instance, a complete chapter.

Some of the excerpts from these letters reveal the intensity and the interdependence of the relationship enjoyed by John Cowper and Phyllis. He to her, July 1925: "Do you remember how we hugged each other in the upper room [at Patchin Place] like two trees in a swamp!" (this simile resurfacing, as Ms. Humfrey points out, in Chapter 4 of the novel); January, 1927: "certain passages I must leave to you [to revise]. They are too hard for me alone." Phyllis Playter, Humfrey seems to suggest, was John Cowper's muse—he writes at times of *Wolf Solent* being "our book," and of finishing "one more chapter for you"—and it was likely that he based a considerable part of his characterization of Christie Malakite upon Phyllis herself, her sympathies and mannerisms. Considering Powys's traveling days were virtually over once he placed *Wolf Solent* with Schuster (whose advance was the basis for Powys's purchase of Phudd Bottom and the beginnings of a quieter, unseparated, life for him and Phyllis), one gets the impression that these letters may well provide us with the fullest, frankest, and most intimate portrait possible of Powys's struggle to give final and cohesive form to this complex work. Belinda Humfrey performs a considerable service in bringing them to the attention of Powys scholars and employing them for the greater elucidation of this novel.

The high quality of Humfrey's opening essay is a reflection of the standard of the collection as a whole, for all of the essays provide positions and findings that allow re-readings of the novel in the light of the writer's interest and expertise. John Hodgson, for example, focuses on the element of self-portraiture in *Wolf Solent* which, applying Powys's phrase from *The Complex Vision*, he more aptly labels "self-vivisection." Powys's novel, suggests Hodgson, is both "deeply self-critical" and a "psychic map" (Powys's words), the act of a novelist in his fifties revisiting with unforgiving candor the mental crises of his twenties and thirties. Hodgson comments perceptively on the style of the book ("stream of self-consciousness"), and upon its open-ended nature: "Readers may feel qualms about the end of *Wolf Solent*, with its dissolution of Wolf's previous self in an ecstatic, but purely mental, new beginning. The authenticity of this new beginning begs substantiation."

Peter Easingwood delineates the high craft of *Wolf Solent*,

which he asserts to be "one of the most powerfully imaginative works of fiction of the modern period." Powys shapes the novel by heightening the role of Wolf yet at the same time passing ironic commentary on the difficulties inherent in the type of escapism in which Wolf indulges. The underlying rhythm of the novel is perceived as comic, or "comic-grotesque," and this Easingwood relates, first, to the fundamentally "humane qualities" of Powys's writing, and then to the power of his characters to transcend conditions of despair and denial.

In contrast to these general, though welcome, statements, the remaining essays enhance our understanding of more discrete aspects of *Wolf Solent*. T.J. Diffey brings out JCP's suspicion of system in philosophy and how, as "a self-consciously philosophical work," *Wolf Solent* investigates reality, both in its methodology and its theme. Ned Lukacher, Ian Hughes, and Charles Lock ably explore various aspects of narrative in the novel, while Ben Jones applies to it Sartre's concept of the "Look" and advances the need for "a placing of Powys's work in the context of European fiction." Penny Smith explores free will, determinism, and stoicism in Wolf's thinking and relates these to his trauma at growing up at the delayed age of thirty-five. Margaret Moran says that the novel "interrogates itself" so that "validity becomes contestable." Peter G. Christensen analyzes Jason's poems and the challenge they present to Wolf's personal mythology: "Ultimately, part of Jason must be accepted, his latent homosexuality, and part of him, his inclination to aestheticize and eroticize death, must be denied in order for Wolf to grow."

How well Powys serves his female characters (and collaterally his women—and men—readers) is a question that, to my mind, deserves vigorous attention. That Powys himself was not disinterested in this question is suggested in an account of a visit to JCP by G. Wilson Knight and Oliver Campion; writes Knight: "Oliver recalls [Powys's] thinking D.H. Lawrence lacked the ability possessed by many great writers to become themselves the women they described." For me, therefore, the fine, perhaps brilliant, essays by Carol Coates and Elizabeth Tombs stand apart in this collection both for their insight into this issue and for their antitheses. In drawing distinctions between the natures of Gerda and Christie, Coates traces in detail their disparate capacities to reveal in Wolf sexual ambivalence, selfishness, and other radical shortcomings. These women, argues Coates, "are fully developed characters. . . . arguably among the best-drawn women in twentieth-century fiction. . . . Although seen by Wolf, and never shown seeing, they

live beyond his view of them. Powys enables us to see beyond the narrator." Tombs, on the other hand, would not (if one understands her definitions correctly) be content with this position. One of her earliest sentences reads: "Powys's quest, through his heroes, is a bid for spiritual freedom; this excludes women, however, who throughout the life-work are kept tethered to a largely conventional scheme." And she goes on to argue in convincing terms that Powys's female figures "remain bound by their sex"; Gerda and Christie "are both distorted creations of male fear, suspicion and insecurity." There is a worthwhile debate being joined here and while neither Coates nor Tombs can provide definitive positions in the limited spaces they are provided, they nevertheless point the way in provocative and percipient fashion.

This collection is a worthy enterprise, and a positive addition to studies of the multi-faceted John Cowper Powys.

John D. Christie, the editor of *Visions and Vices*, notes in his Preface that G. Wilson Knight's "interpretative study and persistent advocacy of Powys's works spans some fifty years." Indeed, Wilson Knight, a prolific critic, appears to have written with greater frequency only upon Shakespeare and Byron, and he believed firmly that Powys held a place, though as yet unrealized, alongside these two giants.

Wilson Knight's *Visions and Vices* contains eleven essays, here designated chapters under Christie's meticulous editorial hand. The first three essays form a natural grouping. The editor places Wilson Knight's "Ultimate Questions: Powysian Answers," a consideration of death in the works of JCP and his author-brothers, at the beginning. Interestingly, it is the last of Wilson Knight's studies of Powys, written as Wilson Knight himself was approaching death. The essay is enlivened by Wilson Knight's confirmed belief in the existence of another order. Spiritualism, magic, and precognition receive full discussion. "Powys's last fantasies," says Wilson Knight, "are spiritually engaged." Powys's mid-length poem, "The Ridge," is considered at the end of this essay, and exclusively in his "Interpretation" of Chapter Two: "I take 'The Ridge' as Powys's most compacted and comprehensive attack on the ultimate problem: death." Read in conjunction with Chapter Three, "Powys on Death," an essay first published in 1972, they provide a broad picture over a period of some two decades of Wilson Knight's evolving view of JCP's understanding of the ultimate.

In succeeding chapters G. Wilson Knight tackles, seriatim: Powys's early philosophizing; ("being based, far more than any rival,

on man's total nature, *The Complex Vision* might be called 'unique'); JCP's philosophical imagery in comparison to that of T.S. Eliot's *Quartets*; the themes of sadism—real or fantasized—and the seraphic—imagined or denied—in Powys's life and work (Wilson Knight records Powys's denial of homosexual impulse but accords "imaginative authority" to his fictive representations of it); the Kundalini Serpent ("Powys's vast and comprehensive wisdom covers both East and West"); Powys as humorist ("he knows he is a great genius; but this genius is one with his importance as clown, as outsider, almost as anarch. But within the anarchy is fun"); *Mortal Strife* (which touches on "the most appalling metaphysical problems," and yet Powys "... wants, on every level, to touch the hearts of humble, unlearned, men"). Finally, in briefer pieces, Wilson Knight discusses Powys's long, early poem, "Lucifer" ("can be read with the kind of enjoyment we have ceased to expect of poetry"), and the prose work, *Homer and the Aether* ("Powys is the only writer of genius who—so far as I know—has set out to make a study of literary inspiration").

These essays are marked by the sort of erudition and clarity of connection that we normally associate with the mind of G. Wilson Knight, as equally they share the elegant, mellifluous style of his other writings. Read alongside *The Saturnian Quest*, Wilson Knight's earlier study of Powys, *Visions and Vices* represents a formidable guide to the rich rewards of reading John Cowper Powys. Cecil Woolf, Wilson Knight's publisher, and John D. Christie, his literary executor, are to be congratulated for their achievement in bringing Wilson Knight's desire for such a collection to posthumous fruition.

Cecil Woolf has also published two collections of Powys letters. The letters to Ichiro Hara represent a correspondence of some significance and were begun at Hara's initiation in Powys's late age when Powys was in fact attempting to reduce the burden of letter writing. Powys, however, seems to have had a special affinity for Hara who was a professor of English at Tokyo's Waseda University, and a translator and promoter of JCP's works. Their common interest in Wordsworth provided a strong bond between them; as the book's editor, Anthony Head, observes, these letters "testify to a rare cross-cultural communion of spirits." The letters to the Trovillions, a prominent Illinois couple, are edited by Paul Roberts and cover a far longer period than those to Ichiro Hara. While these letters are perhaps less substantial as a collection, they nevertheless contain some touching lines, as in this blissful characterization by JCP at age 89 of his life with Phyllis: "Phyllis and I are so happy together, and for a long time we have had our Government's special

permission to live and work and write together while she keeps her American Citizenship."

Beautifully produced, these collections are uniform with the two volumes of Powys letters previously published by Cecil Woolf. One hopes that Mr. Woolf will take an interest in producing additional items by John Cowper Powys—his Diary for the years 1932 to 1934 perhaps? Presently unpublished, the entries for these years record Powys's life at Phudd Bottom during that extraordinary and unequalled span of productivity that resulted in *A Glastonbury Romance*, the *Autobiography*, and *Weymouth Sands*. ♦

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Notes on this Issue

The present issue features contributions from Ben Jones and Denis Lane, as well as a review of Lane's recent collection, *In the Spirit of Powys*. Perhaps this emphasis can serve as a small reminder of the enormous contribution made by Jones as President and Lane as Executive Secretary of the Powys Society of North America. Without Jones and Lane there would be no organized network of Powysian scholarship in North America at the present time; the society and the journal these two helped found thrived during the eighties because of their persistent and ingenious efforts, plus a certain infusion of style. Society and journal will continue to do well, we hope, during the economically perilous times that seem to be ahead of us.

With regard to those economically perilous times: we encourage Powysians to ask local college and university libraries to subscribe to Powys Notes, if they do not do so already. A circular enclosed with the current issue can be presented to sympathetic librarians, along with the presenter's recommendation that the journal be acquired. For those wishing complete runs: most back issues are available at \$5.00 each, U.S., \$6.50 each, Canadian. Those that are not will be provided in xeroxed form at \$2.00, U.S., \$2.50, Canadian.

America and the Powyses: An Invitation to our 1992 Conference

The essay in this issue not mentioned thus far, John Cowper Powys's on "The American Scene," first appeared in *The Century Magazine* in 1929. Its republication this year is particularly timely: the PSNA has scheduled for May 1992, in New York City, a conference on America and the Powyses. Michael Ballin writes on this upcoming event: "Although the conference will primarily explore the relationship between the Powys brothers—John Cowper and Llewellyn—and America, the conference organizers anticipate that there will also be an opportunity to explore the major modernist theme of the literary and cultural relationship between Britain and America. The following brief survey of the main connections between the Powyses and America may suggest possible themes for papers. Discussions of other British writers who reacted profoundly

to the spirit of America—such as D.H. Lawrence—will also be considered.

John Cowper Powys had important personal and literary connections with Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters and Henry Miller. However, America was also a cultural and psychological experience of a creatively transforming nature which is given imaginative expression in the *Autobiography*, and the posthumously published novel *After My Fashion*. Powys's whirlwind lecture tours of the United States and his often ignored participation in the work of the Chicago theater with Maurice Brown created this deep involvement in a culture which liberated him socially and psychologically from England. Although JCP once wrote an essay on the distinctive differences between England and America and often uses America writers such as Walt Whitman and Melville as points of reference in his writings, his creative fiction written in the United States is usually regional and British in its location. Instructive parallels with other exiled writers, such as James Joyce, could usefully be made. Some of the better writings of Llewellyn Powys were also successfully published in America. The reasons for the American success of *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* again invite explanation and analysis. Llewellyn was a critic for *The New York Herald Tribune* and had a close friendship with Edna St. Vincent Millay."

Conference proposals and requests for further information (including exact time and place) may be sent to either Richard Maxwell, c/o Department of English, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana, U.S.A. 46383, or Michael Ballin, c/o Department of English, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3C7.

Observations Social and Bibliographic, by the Editor and Others

In October 1990, a group of Powys Society members visited Phudd Bottom. Denis Lane sends the following report: "WHEN WE REACHED THE GATE THE T.T. LOOKED AT HER HOUSE AND LIKED IT." So wrote JCP in his diary on the evening of April 12, 1930, the day that he and Phyllis Playter arrived to spend the next four years of their lives at Phudd Bottom, a simple Dutch-style cottage nestled at the foot of a mountain that Powys called Phudd. Though Phyllis ("the T.T.") was to have continual misgivings about her house, it, and the surrounding Columbia County countryside, served JCP well, for during his tenure there he wrote his magnificent works, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Autobiography*, and *Weymouth Sands*, as well as other pieces.

Powys could hardly have imagined that a little over sixty years later his home would be in the private ownership of a professional woman of wide and cultured interests, that it would be restored to a state of cozy elegance it surely never knew during his time, and that a merry band of PSNA members would be given the rare opportunity to explore its every nook and cranny on a delightful October day. Nor could he have foreseen that his nephew, the brilliant and vital Peter Powys Grey, would lead this band on a fascinated tour of the property and environs, pointing out the nearest water pump in the meadow across the road, visiting the stream where Powys rescued drought-threatened minnows, and reliving Powys moments on a leafy plateau halfway up the mountain.

Thank you, Virginia, for sharing your home; and thank you, Peter, for sharing your memories."

Sara Dorow of Valparaiso University calls attention to a story by Gail Godwin, "Dream Children," where a quoted passage (from a Dreiser biography?) narrates the tale of John Cowper's spectral appearance to Theodore Dreiser, at a moment when Dreiser was in New York and Powys in Phudd Bottom (or travelling towards it). "Dream Children" has been around since 1976. I have recently spotted it in two college literary anthologies; it has speedily

become a familiar offering.

A recent *Raritan* (Winter 1991) includes William Kerrigan's long review, "The Perverse *Kulturgeschichte* of Camille Paglia" [on Paglia's *Sexual Personae*, published by Yale last year] Kerrigan quotes and glosses Paglia as follows: "'My largest ambition is to fuse Frazer with Freud'...this was perhaps Freud's largest ambition as well. The sentence must be radically revised in the case of Paglia. The name of Frazer can be left in place, but will be dwarfed by some additional company: Jane Harrison (but without her nostalgia for chthonic goodness); Erich Neumann (the theme of the Great Mother); G. Wilson Knight and the tradition of sexual nature magic he inherited in part from John Cowper Powys; Krafft-Ebing's museum of perversity in *Psychopathia Sexualis*; Mario Praz's demonstration of a bond between Romanticism and sadism in *The Romantic Agony*; the sexual magic of filmmakers from Josef von Sternberg to Kenneth Anger." This list will cause indigestion in some of our readers, while in others reviving youth, spring, and happiness. For my own part, I am prompted to wonder: why did the JCP described by Kerrigan never catch on during the 1960s?

Paglia is currently working on volume two of *Sexual Personae*, which will be devoted to the twentieth century. Should someone write her and inform her of JCP's existence? Or does she already know?

Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe writes, "I thought you might like to know of a couple of references to TFP which may have escaped general notice. *Peterley Harvest* (subtitled *The Private Diary of David Peterley* and published as such, but generally, it would seem, supposed to be the work of its ostensible editor Richard Pennington) was originally published in 1960 and is set in the inter-war years, mainly from 1930 to 1939. The book is written in a mixture of modes, and appears to include the fictional, the factual and most points between." Mr. d'Ingerthorpe quotes two passages from *Peterley Harvest*, one on page 80 of the 1987 Penguin edition, the other on page 218. The first of these mentions that "most peculiar book," *Unclay*, the second concerns a conversation with Arthur Machen: "He told me of the little girl that T.F. Powys has with him in his cottage at Chaldon. Machen says it is his son's daughter and that Theo took her on condition her mother did not interfere. He is educating her himself, mostly, it seems, by readings of the scriptures." Mr. d'Ingerthorpe suggests that this latter bit of gossip

may reflect "the prevailing belief current at the time."

JCP's Arthurian lore was bound to be treated somewhere along the line in the epic and apparently unending D.S. Brewer series, "Arthurian Studies." Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since 1900* (1983), devote ten appreciative pages to *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius*.

Two recent books treat the history of the spa: *The English Spa 1560-1815: A Social History*, by Phyllis Hembry (Athlone Press, 1990) and *The Medical History of Waters and Spas*, edited by Roy Porter (Wellcome Institute, 1990). Both of these make suggestive reading for anyone who might want to think seriously about the social background and the intermingled fascination with medicine and tourism in *A Glastonbury Romance*.

Ezra Pound and Margaret Cravens: A Tragic Friendship, 1910-1912 (Duke University Press, 1989) treats a milieu and a relationship which will be of considerable interest to Powysians.

In *TLS* for November 2-8, 1990, Glen Cavaliero reviews the Wilson Knight collection and the two volumes of letters treated by Denis Lane in the present issue of *Powys Notes*.

Norman Donaldson writes: "I have a first edition of *A Baker's Dozen* by Llwellyn Powys, published by Trovillion Private Press, Merrion, Illinois, in 1939. It is housed in a case and is signed by the author and by the artist, Mathias Noheimer. It was a gift to my wife, now dead, from the widow of the Powys enthusiast Emerson Lloyd Siberell, who wrote the introduction. Perhaps you could help me dispose of the such in such a way that it reaches the hands of another Powys aficionado?" Interested parties can write to Mr. Donaldson at 4510 Chinook, San Diego, CA 92117.