

# The Powys Review

WINTER 1977. NUMBER TWO



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'A book of wisdom and wonders'  
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# The Powys Review

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## Editorial

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*The Powys Review* was introduced by the publication of three eminent critics' lectures on various aspects of the fiction of John Cowper Powys. It is John Cowper Powys, novelist, poet, literary critic, essayist, autobiographer and philosopher on an even larger scale than Theodore or Llewelyn, who has attracted the majority of critical attention, and is likely to do so for sometime. The larger part of the present *Review* is devoted to John's work, although Theodore and Llewelyn are vigorously examined. The Editor hopes to receive more critical studies, of an appropriately high academic and literary quality, devoted to the two neglected brothers.

Critical reviews of the writings of Llewelyn and Theodore would no doubt be more plentiful if there were more current reprints of their work. Readers of John Cowper Powys are now well-supported: Macdonald keep up hardback editions of a central core of his novels (some 6 or 7); and, in paperbacks, the Village Press put out some 47 titles, including all sorts of rare odds and ends; Picador have produced *A Glastonbury Romance* and promise 5 more titles by 1979, including the massive *Owen Glendower*; the Rivers Press have provided *Weymouth Sands*; Penguin Books *Wolf Solent*; and Sphere Books *Morwyn* (with an astonishing declaration in its Preface, by the late Dennis Wheatley, that John Cowper's "major works" are *Ducdame*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Morwyn*). BUT, Llewelyn's most recent reprints are only four—from the Village Press, and, while Chatto and Windus, Theodore's publishers, produce only three titles in hardback, the only other current publications, all in paperback, are *Mr Tasker's Gods* and *Mark Only* from the Trigon Press, the Village Press's most valuable reprint of *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, and Penguin Books' unadventurous issue of *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. A larger readership for Theodore would clearly be gained by more

reprints, especially if these included the much acclaimed *Unclay*, the more broadly compassionate and comic *Kindness in a Corner*, and the brilliant *Fables* (also entitled *No Painted Plumage*).

*The Powys Review*, 2, gives some special attention to the two novels generally thought to be the most readable introductions to the works of their authors, *Wolf Solent* and *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. (And who would quarrel with the opinion of the selectors for Penguin Books that this is where we should start?) A larger aim, however, in compiling the present selection of new critical essays, has been to indicate some of the directions in which Powys studies might continue and expand. Richard Luckett's analysis of T. F. Powys's use of language, and Michael Roulstone's argumentative survey of Llewelyn's whole achievement, are, apart from their intrinsic critical merits, both provocative studies. The other articles, all on John Cowper Powys, look, in turn, at the following subjects: his religious ideas; his philosophy compared with the philosophies of those he read and criticised, from Spinoza to William James; deleted manuscript chapters of one of his novels, as they throw light on his art and moral direction; a comparison of his novels with the novels of a great contemporary; his use of some Welsh history and places. Each of these articles, while complete in itself, indicates a large, rich field for future critical analysis.

In addition in the present *Review*, we begin the production of previously unpublished Powysian material of literary and biographical value. Oliver Marlow Wilkinson discusses and quotes from John Cowper Powys's love letters to Frances Gregg, his mother, who married the Powyses' friend, Louis Wilkinson. (Oliver Wilkinson has been collecting the Frances Gregg correspondence into a vast volume, entitled *Frances and Jack*, and we look forward to its publication.) In addition, by courtesy of

E. E. Bissell, who owns the manuscripts, and of Alasdair Tilson of Carleton University, Ottawa, who is working on the whole correspondence, we include some of John Cowper Powys's letters to Theodore from America. This group of letters is valuable in describing J. C. Powys's life as an itinerant lecturer in the 1920s, that thinly documented area of his life, and also in providing us with his critical view of some of Theodore's work.

The outward-looking nature of some of the critical studies in the present *Review* points to a larger editorial hope. Specialist studies of the works of the Powyses still appear to be only beginning, and we must

have many more of these. However, it is important that the *Review* should not be inward-looking. From only the materials of John Cowper Powys's writings arise discussions of psychology, religion, philosophy and art. The broad range of Powys's own literary studies provides a basis for discussions of both a great variety of comparable influential European and American writing, from Rabelais to Walt Whitman, and also of contemporary writings and problems from the 1890s to the 1960s. Our hope is that the *Powys Review* will reflect the generous breadth of knowledge, thought and vision of its three inspirers.

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# Richard Lockett

## T. F. Powys: Aspects of his Language

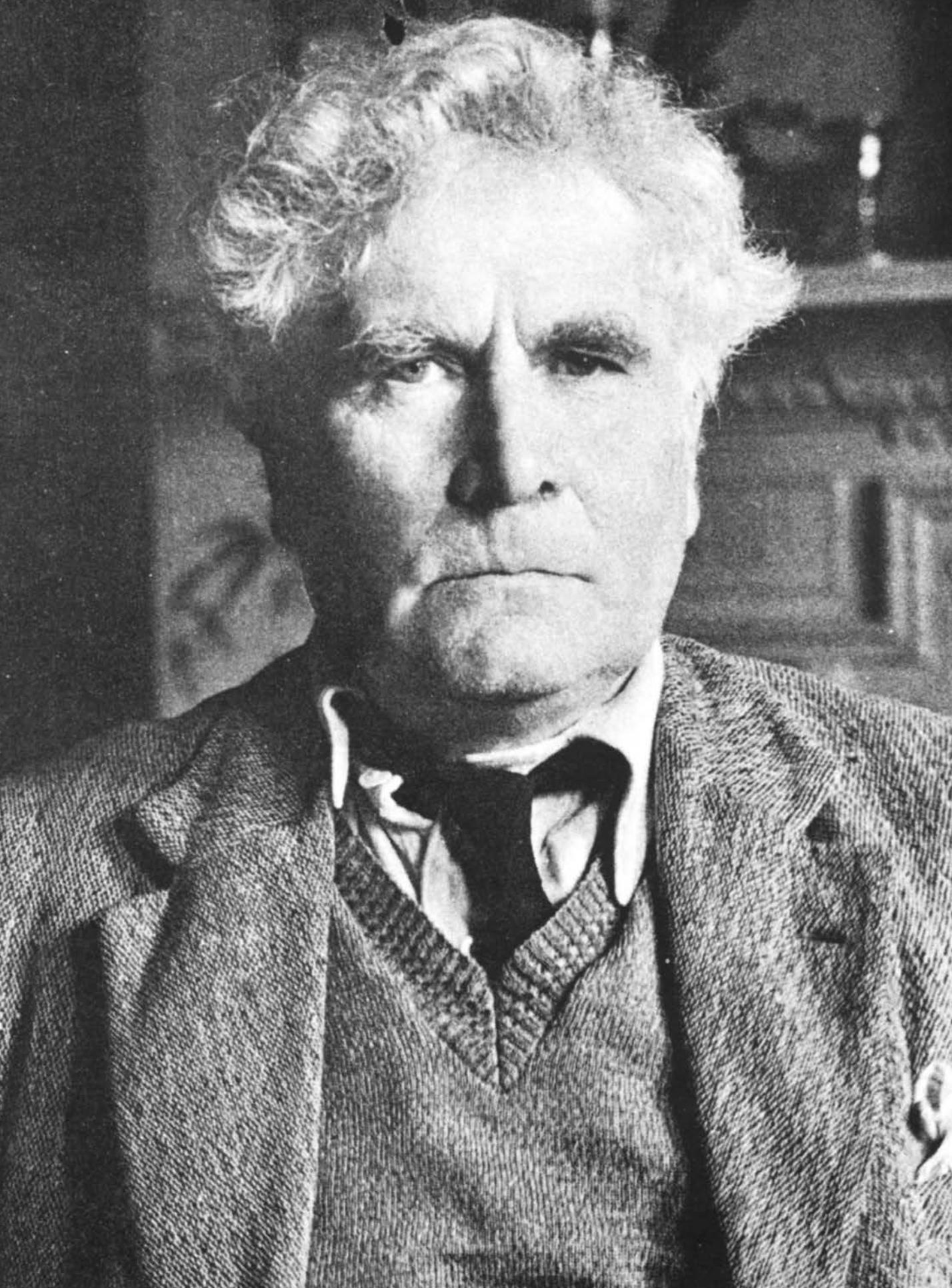
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The last chapter of *Innocent Birds* begins with one of Theodore Powys's most disturbingly allusive sentences: "Often the sea waves, although they christen them in the certainty of an everlasting reformation from all the old Adam, forget to name the dead they give up". It ends with Miss Pettifer throwing Mr. Tucker's "story-book" on the fire. There, as the Bible burns, the flames in the hearth consume the greater lights that shine from the end of *Revelations*. Yet we know that Mr. Tucker's book has not been truly destroyed, that the reality of the poetic creation of light, no less than the actual light of the sun which is both the life and the eventual destruction of our world, will persist despite Miss Pettifer.

It is entirely characteristic that here, where he achieves one of his subtlest, most ironically shaded effects, Powys starts with *Genesis* and the ambivalent integration of the chaos of waters into the later stages of the making of the world, and ends with *Revelations*. The point I wish to emphasise is not that Powys was greatly influenced in all aspects of his literary technique by the Bible, for this commonplace observation, though obviously true, has tended to obscure a matter of more importance: Powys's use, in his work, of the Bible as *theme*, as Book of books, the Word which is also (and no more and no less than) words, the artefact that can encompass a whole civilization, the fullest possible statement of the poetic position, a naming, identification and creation of the world. His attitude to words, to 'naming', to fiction even, is a product of his lifelong pondering of this theme; the stylistic mannerisms are accidents, not the essence. That *An Interpretation of Genesis* was his first published work cannot be put down to coin-

cidence; nor should the obviously archaic and derivative nature of its language, which we may well find an insurmountable critical impediment, blind us to the postulate that requires its use. In questioning Moses about the origins and nature of things Zetetes must necessarily employ language as the medium for his thought and questioning. In this context language becomes more than words, more than Hebrew or English. The effect, of course, suggests a committee of the Authorized Version translators unaccountably displaced in time and unleashed on Nietzsche; but the intention, I believe, was to create a universal and impersonal resonance. In due course Powys was to find that the universal sorted better with simplicity than with complexity, and that no human utterance could be wholly impersonal.

The local causes of Powys's engagement with the Bible are easy to understand; his birth and education put him in daily contact with it, and when he elected to live out his life in the English countryside he chose also to live in a world where the Bible was still known and read as was no other book. In rejecting the faith of his father, without rejecting his father's values or his father's world, he both kept and lost the Book, and in losing it he perforce gained a sense of what it had been or could have been to him. There are scattered observations by D.H. Lawrence which suggest that he, too, had something of this sense, but Lawrence never drew on it directly in his work, probably because he was unsettled in relation both to place and to tradition in a way that Powys was not. Strangely it is Joyce who, despite his Roman Catholic upbringing and his self-imposed exile, most nearly touches on Powys's concerns. Joyce's notion of "the rite



words in the rote order" is sacramental rather than scriptural, but it was brought to fruition by his interest in a man who offers unexpected illuminations of Powys's work: Giambattista Vico. Though criticism has stressed Vico's influence on the cycle form of *Finnegans Wake*, I know of no adequate discussion of his part in shaping *Ulysses*. The vital points are these: in his *Scienza nuova* (1725) Vico endeavours to analyze the "common nature of nations" or "of humanity". In so doing he gives "poetry", in its broadest sense, a role of the utmost importance. He sees a language as a witness to the customs of the nation that speaks it, and thus as a repository of natural law. So, to Vico, Homer is the true lawgiver of the Greeks, and because Homer and the language he wrote in became accepted as the ground of Greek civilization, so we can learn something about the core of that civilization (and thus our own) by studying his works. What is more, Homer conditions as well as reflects; he shapes the future of civilization, for all that he claims to describe its past. So Vico provides the basis for a new philosophy of language, which is a direct precursor of the philosophy implicit in much modern thinking about linguistics (and, in particular, structuralism). There is no evidence to suggest that Powys studied Vico; what I am proposing is simply that, for Powys, the King James Bible\* assumed elements of that significance which Homer had for Vico, and, through Vico, for Joyce. It provided a framework of myth which enacted values, and it presented a language which had a particular reference to Powys's own civilization, and could serve both as an interpretative and evaluative instrument—in which respect the Bible serves Powys better than Homer serves Joyce.

Some such notion as this can, I suggest, help us to understand how Powys, who could be so enraged by the cruelty of God, and so contemptuous of church-people, and was divided from his mother (whom he

loved) by his "heresies", nevertheless continued to read the lessons in church. (Hardy, equally agnostic, was also a regular church-goer, but I do not believe that he attended in quite the same spirit as Powys; the "Apology" prefacing *Late Lyrics and Earlier* will suggest why.) But we should not necessarily consider Powys as most closely influenced by the Bible when he is nearer to it (as in *An Interpretation of Genesis*): he is no less knit in with it later in his career, when his style had so markedly changed and he himself thought of his earlier writings as "odd". His importance is general rather than specific; it becomes an ideal of style rather than a source of stylistic imitation; it stands as the final expression of poetic power and scope, as the ultimate exaltation of the word. If we turn to his literary admirations, to Bunyan, Jeremy Taylor, William Law, or to his forebear Cowper, we find that they have in common the scriptural ground to their work. But we would be mistaken if we presumed that this made them, for Powys, special cases: Coleridge ranked Taylor with Shakespeare, Bacon and Milton; we have Dr. Johnson's testimony for Law. If the tradition is lost to us now, as something which we can feel as Johnson and Coleridge must have done, that is not a reason why it should have been lost to the author of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*.

John Cowper Powys, comparing Theodore's work with his own and with Llewelyn's, made the essential point: "Theodore's genius, for all the simplicity and purity of his style, is much more disillusioned, in a sense much more sophisticated, than anything possible to us". The remark provides an appropriate context not only for reflection on Theodore's critical acumen, but also for his enthusiasm for Freud, in whom he was to find, significantly, style as *mythos*, and a world view which, because it was comprehensive, allowed play for a sceptical intelligence. In *Unclay* we can see, in his picture of the miser, what power the conjunction of Freudianism with Powys's other concerns might unloose:

\* Powys knew and used variant passages and modern readings; nevertheless the King James version remained, in the most positive sense, 'his' Bible.

He believes in unity; if he holds one penny in his hand, it is all he thinks he has. He hoards only units. He believes that his belly is a bank, and his guts hiding places for gold. What passes from him, he regards as lost. His most constant fear is that his store may go into the belly of another . . .

## II

The heart of Theodore Powys's style is its simplicity, of both grammar and diction—a simplicity perhaps most obvious when we consider the remarkable preponderance of Anglo-Saxon words, which makes him so different from the multi-adjectival, eclectic, urban John Cowper, whose view of language is aptly summarized by the phrase which, so he tells us, he responded to with such vigour: "*congeries of living organisms*". But Theodore's simplicity of diction is never removed from acute sensitivity to the texture of words, and one of the commonest yet most moving effects of his writing is a rediscovery of a word's primal sense—as if Adam's naming had only just occurred. Mr. Weston's reflection on the word "love" is an example: his sense of the mildness of its sound, qualified by his awareness that: "it appears, for all its mildness, to have something in it very forcible and violent". This simplicity must of its nature be unevasive, must force writer, character and reader to face what simple words mean, and in doing so accords with Powys's declaration that: "I have never had the least objection to ugly things. If my fire warms me, what do I care if the grate is a square black hole in the wall with three varnished iron sunflowers in a row above it". The language comes to 'the thing itself' in the sense that Hooker used the phrase (*Ecclesiastical Polity* V. 32), the quintessence. It is something we may occasionally find in Lawrence (chiefly in his letters and informal writings), and more often in the poems of Robert Graves. Orwell achieves it from time to time, as does Synge in *The Aran Islands* and in two or three of his poems. It is an effect as unusual in others as it is ordinary to Powys. Yet in Powys's case

it is never exclusive of another, much more social and even ephemeral sensitivity to language, which can remind us of that admiration for Jane Austen which all the Powys brothers shared. It is there when Mr. Bunce shouts at Mr. Grobe:

'If God 'Imself did ring front door bell', he exclaimed, 'and were brought by Miss Tamar or our own Jenny into this room, I would say out loud as I be now talking that 'tis 'E and not Grunter who do cuddle they naughty maids.'

Mr. Bunce was not the man to miss the chance, though he was angry, of saying the right thing to a neighbour. And, although a knock at a door isn't a ring, Mr. Bunce had most properly said 'the front door bell', as a nice compliment to a gentleman's house, where a bell should be the correct means of conveying the intelligence that someone has called, even though a knocking at the door does imply the same wish to enter as the pealing of a bell.

Mr. Bunce had hardly spoken when a modest rapping was heard at the rectory front door.

Through the comic play on the "proper" way of speaking we have been brought to God's advent at Folly Down Rectory. The digression brings about, by means of its light handling of manners, its exposition of the courtesies accorded to rank, and even the comic typography of divine aspirations, a vital change in pacing, a slowing down that enlarges the almost intolerable ironies of the situation that it describes.

To reiterate the word 'simplicity' is to court misunderstanding, for it can all too easily be taken to suggest a solemnity that is quite alien to Powys. That he must *suggest* solemnity, and does so through his measured statements, is indisputable, yet the purpose of this is far from solemn. It is equally misleading to take refuge in modern critical hocus-pocus and to produce the word 'complex', arguing that through simplicity of means Powys produces complexity of effect. His effects are seldom complex, for all that they are almost always ironic: they, too, are devastatingly simple. Some examples from *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* may help.

'Although [remarks Mr. Weston] in our advertisements we have spoken of our wine as

being new, that is merely said for the sake of young men who reside in universities, and who only approve of their own generation.'

'Mr. Grobe preaches twice every Sunday, but he never names God in his sermons.'

'He must, then,' said Mr. Weston, 'find the Holy Trinity a useful institution.'

[Michael, describing Luke Bird to Mr. Weston] 'He is despised, and I will add, if you have no objection, he is rejected of men. His cup, his platter, and his purse are nearly always empty.'

In this last instance we are far past mere humour, past even the exquisite delicacy of the end of Chapter XIX, where the lack of any sounds of footsteps or latch before the parlour door of the Angel Inn opens reminds us that there is one who moves in a way even more mysterious than that of Mr. Vosper crawling to the door. So Michael shows a tactful deference to the feelings of an author who hears, in another's mouth, a passage having its origins in his most private emotions. At the same time he touches, with the utmost seriousness, on the primary fact of Mr. Weston's existence and experience: the crucifixion of his son, prophesied in the Psalms, enacted in the Gospels. Here, then, even the problem of providence, Milton's crux of foreknowledge, is alluded to, and seen as tragic, yet as humanizing, as pressing God's wisdom from the vat where ordinary human experience is trodden out; and simultaneously the whole analogy between the artist's creation and its mysteriousness and the mysteries of God's creation, which must permit of both evil and the unknown within an apparent economy, is touched upon and as lightly, yet tellingly, left.

### III

If we look at Powys's style in some detail it becomes apparent that though he purged it of its major oddities, he never achieved (nor, I suppose, did he wish to achieve) a style of classical correctness. Here are four illustrations of this from the first chapters of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*:

(1) As it is a very rare thing to meet or to see any one that would be worth our while to look at twice in so dull a place as a small provincial town . . .

(2) We will note his behaviour that is more important to us than the suddenness of his arrival, for it is from a man's behaviour when he does not know that he is being watched that his character, as well as his situation and rank in the world, may be discovered.

(3) 'Michael,' said Mr. Weston, after he had regarded the little hamlet of Folly Down with such intensity that, did we not know how important trade is in civilized country—or, indeed, in any country—might have been thought unduly curious—'Michael, would you be so kind as to give me the book?'

(4) The hedges were white with sloe blossom, and the willow bushes were in flower; a few butterflies were abroad and the bumble bees.

These passages might all be regarded as in some sense wrong (indeed they have led me to consider the textual aspect of the novel as worth investigation). In (1) an "it" would conventionally be added after "that": "any one that (it) would be worth our while to look at". (2) lacks a conjunction after "behaviour". (3) has an imperfectly related parenthetical clause. (4) requires a comma after "abroad", though even that would not satisfy all critics. Yet in each instance the *meaning* is not in doubt. It is logical, then, to ask whether we can find a single explanation for these four apparent *lacunae*, and there seems to be a simple answer: Powys consistently attempted to eliminate superfluous conjunctions, pronouns, and adverbs. The urge to do away with such parts of speech, which had tended to proliferate so long as Augustan prose maintained its importance as a popular model, has been the indirect cause of much stylistic modification in the last hundred years, notably in Hopkins, in Joyce and in Pound. So in (4) Powys doesn't add a final "too" ("a few butterflies were abroad and the bumble bees [too]") because that would make his sentence unbalanced and wordy. He doesn't write "a few butterflies and bumble bees were abroad", because the bumble bees were not few. If he says that "a

few butterflies and the bumble bees were abroad" then he appears to suggest that all the bumble bees in the world were there, which was not the case. Instead he prefers to treat his bumble bees with just the degree of grammatic waywardness that wind-blown bees exhibit when the willows are in flower.

The problem with (2) is the repetition of "for". If it is used, as it normally would be, as the conjunction after "behaviour", then its repetition following "arrival" is ugly. If it is left out after "arrival", as is perfectly legitimate, then "it is from a man's behaviour . . ." tends to sound aphoristic and pretentious—and it is just this tone that Powys must avoid if *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* is to succeed (the wonder of it is, of course, that he always does avoid it). Other ways round the problem all make the sentence less flowing, more formal. What Powys preserves, by his knowing omission, is a naturalness in the sentence—a naturalness which does not have so much to do with grammar as with the precise notation of a thought. In (3) the problem is that the obvious correction, the insertion of an "it" to make "[it] might have been thought unduly curious", creates an ambiguity: it could be Folly Down that "might have been thought unduly curious". (1) provides a very straightforward example of what so often happens in Powys. A second "it" ("to see anyone that it would be worth while . . .") might grate a little, though not violently. But, left as it is, the sentence is given something of the impetus of speech, and an informality to counteract the formality of the sentiment.

This habit of Powys's has been worth discussing in some detail, because some readers have a niggling sense of it without being fully aware of what it is that causes the sensation. Nevertheless it is a device that usually succeeds, without creating any awkwardness. To take notice of it is simply to observe that Powys's simplicity is as studious, as hard won, as the stylised speech of his rustics, that a sense of flow—the subjection of each part to the whole current of narrative—was of the

greatest concern to him, and that he was as willing to be quietly heretical in matters of expression as he was in any other field of thought or artistry.

Powys's pacing of sentences, paragraphs and chapters is allied, both in purpose and execution, to his idiosyncratic habits of expression. He treats story and language as dependent; he never attempts to hold us with digression independent of story, or story independent of reflection. By and large (the exceptions, though remarkable and important, are fewer than might be imagined) the whole development of the novel after Defoe has been in another direction to this. Yet Powys refuses to write in such a way that we can postulate any separation of 'teller' and 'tale', or isolate the way in which the tale is told. Without the way of telling there would be no tale; without the tale no way of telling. The *Fables* are the logical conclusion of his method. Since this is so, speed of narration is essential, and here the first sentence of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* is particularly cunning. It is astonishingly neutral in its tone; the neutrality itself obtrudes—as it is meant to: "A Ford car, of a type that is commonly used in England to deliver goods in rural districts stood, at half-past three in the afternoon, before the Rod and Lion Hotel at Maidenbridge upon the 20th November 1923". The components of this sentence could be arranged in almost any order. Indeed, as it stands, the sentence is arguably faulty (we would expect the car to stand on a road, not a date). In the next sentence the casual admission of the archaic "wont" ("as was its wont") and the colloquial "wasn't" ("sleep that wasn't in the least likely to be disturbed") prepare the reader for almost anything. But at once the rhythms begin to take over, emerging the more positively from this unemphatic beginning, so that soon we are ready to accept the town-children's expectations of what it is that might emerge from the vehicle ("an ape, a dog-faced woman, or an armless man") with all their suggestions of the medieval and the grotesque. Then, on

the appearance of Miss Gipps the language modulates with extraordinary subtlety:

As there was nothing between the lady and the Ford car, it was the most natural thing in the world that she should look at, or at least notice, the car and its driver. She quickened her pace a little, for she did not care to be thought a loiterer, supposing, as indeed was most true, that the gentleman in the car was looking at her as well as she at him.

Here the touches of comedy irresistibly recall Jane Austen (notably chapter VI of *Northanger Abbey*, in the Pump-Room at Bath); the implied correction of "or at least notice", the way Miss Gipps's pace quickens, the manner in which the conclusion brings the ideas together, all are exquisite. And the language can be still further modulated into this:

Miss Gipps's faith—and as soon as she saw the driver of the Ford car she believed—now caused her to be more sure than ever that what she longed for, and asked for in her prayers, would come to pass.

"She believed" acquires its full significance here; its setting in no way devalues it and it does not, as a word, have to fight the claims of other words; it sufficiently sustains all its implications.

Powys's language works in so many other ways as well, though they have the same dependence on simplicity. He is able to use an unevasive sexual vocabulary with no suggestion of prurience to it: that 'to force' and 'to have' can be used without circumlocution is of the utmost importance, and it is his integrity of style that gives him this freedom, essential for the success of the fable. He can develop his own succinct approximations to the interior monologue, as when Mr. Burt watches the unleaving Autumn trees: "'It was most likely', he thought, 'entirely owing to their stupid and ignorant habits that his wages were lowered'." The secret is in the change of rhythm, which makes any disruptive change of vocabulary unnecessary. There are passages of almost painterly description, where we can sense the weight and heaviness of what is described in the *impasto* of the description, whilst seeing the object portrayed with the utmost clarity:

The winds of heaven were still and quiet too, for the autumn storms had finished their battering and had blown themselves out, and the clouds that had once travelled so swiftly round the world were now stopped dead and were hanging, a stupid, grey mass, over the town.

#### IV

I have tried to sketch some of those things that Powys's style can accomplish. In concluding I want to return to my starting point: Powys's reverence for the word, which embraces an attitude to poetic creation. I have remarked on the importance, in his work, of tale, of fable, and on the fact that this is not separable from the act of telling and the medium of telling, from his language. I think that beyond that one can see how the right and full use of language encompasses a notion of humanity. What I want to emphasize above all is that this moves Powys away from Dorset and England, whilst at the same time not moving him. He must not be made to seem a Dorset sage if this jeopardises his real status as a European writer, yet without his roots in place and language he would be nothing. He is, I think, distinctly modern, yet the tendency for an English ear that is less than alert is to hear him as anything but that. His work has points of correspondence with that of Borges and of Cesare Pavese, authors not of the subjective fables of the north (the tradition of Hoffmann and Kafka), but of another kind of fable, which Nietzsche described but could not write, and which it is not fanciful to trace back to the *mythos*. It is appropriate here to recall Pavese's question: "When a civilization is no longer linked with the country, what will be the radical sources of its culture?" In his *Dialoghi con Leuco* Pavese tried to explore an aspect of this theme, but because the myths he drew on were so far removed, linguistically if not culturally, from the shapes of life that he wished to delineate, it is one of his least successful works. But Powys still moved in a world where "an old book" was "still sometimes to be seen upon

the front room table in a countryman's cottage", where some residual shared area of *mythos* remained incarnate in a language. In and upon this world his imagination played; that vivid irony that was not the irony of a stoic, of a man who could contemplate death unmoved, without despair or delight, but an irony that drew for its strength on a sense of the necessity of death, the fact that without death there

would be no life. The observation is as old as Heraclitus, and as modern as the most recent understanding of evolutionary theory. Powys knew the first and was equipped from his reading to anticipate the second; but it is not as knowledge, but as feeling embodied in fable, sensation told over and resolved, that his sense of this has meaning.

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# Michael Roulstone

## Llewelyn Powys

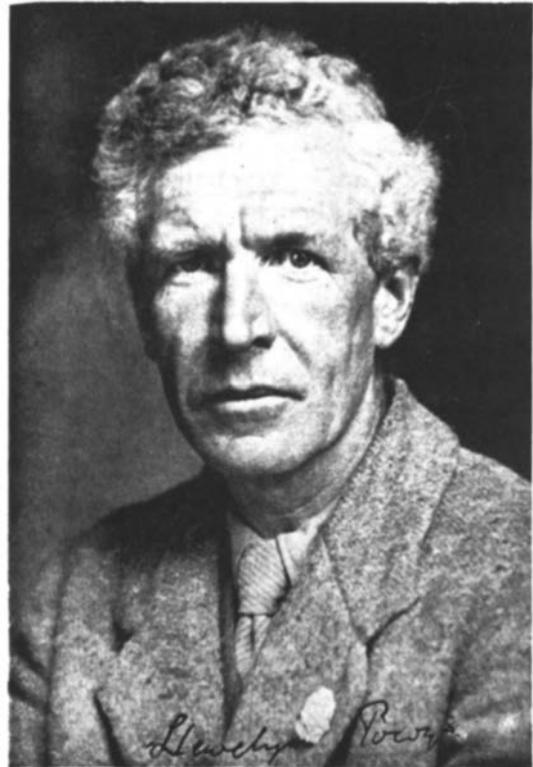
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Unlike his two brothers, Llewelyn Powys was not an inventive writer. He was a craftsman who wrote on a diversity of subjects and whose attraction resides in his style, in his sturdy idealism, and in his unusual consciousness of time's passing and the frailty and wonder of individual human existence.

As a literary practitioner, although upon occasion he could be a little ponderous, Llewelyn believed in candour and directness. He preferred Edmund Blunden to T.S. Eliot, what is mellifluous to what is harsh, and what is instinctive and based upon observation and experience to what is overtly intellectual and experimental solely for experiment's sake. His attitude towards sexual love, which is far too open to misinterpretation, or rather misappropriation, is analogous to this. He preached freedom, but he did not approve of the kind of orgiastic licentiousness depicted in the celebrated wall paintings at Pompeii.

It was for similar reasons that Llewelyn did not really approve either of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, which he described to his brother John as "utterly lacking in health". He continued: "what a mean, vicious, ardent spirit Dante has, how cowardly!"<sup>1</sup> But Dante was a writer of great intellectual incisiveness with a highly developed imagination, and it was these characteristics which Llewelyn above all lacked. The following passage from a letter he wrote to John Rowland in the last year of his life adequately sums up his literary standpoint:

The present cry that the best literature is a mere product of the cunning of the cold intellect is but an empty store of words. Clever and artful poetry, clever and artful prose melts like hoar-frost—the rudest proverb, the wildest verse from the oldest ballad lasts



longer. Writing to be worth anything must have the thumb-mark of life upon it, heavy and spatulate.<sup>2</sup>

Llewelyn's particular merits are two in number, and derive from quite separate aspects of his work. He could present his rationalistic outlook on life in the most beguiling and eloquent language, and he possessed a very sure talent for self-presentation. The latter is especially of interest, for it frequently took the form of "Luluisation", and is in evidence not merely in the autobiographical writings but throughout Llewelyn's work. "Lulu" was the family name for Llewelyn, and when he became enthusiastic about something he was said to "Luluisse" it; more specifically,

to appropriate it to himself and in so doing give to it a touch of his own character. In his books the subjects of this "Luluisation" ranged from worthies to the places in which he lived and the members of his own family.

Llewelyn's writings can be divided fairly conveniently into three periods, and it is the main purpose of this essay, by so dividing them, to place Llewelyn's work in perspective and at the same time to point to certain of its strengths and weaknesses. Llewelyn's first independent publication, in 1923, was the volume of short stories and other pieces, *Ebony and Ivory*. Leaving aside the "Ivory" stories, most of which date from 1913, there is an initial period in Llewelyn's work extending from the first of the "Ebony", or African, stories of 1920 to the writing of *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* (1927) towards the end of 1925. Falling between the two titles already mentioned were *Thirteen Worthies* (1924), *Black Laughter* (1925), and *Skin for Skin* (1926).

In these early works Llewelyn attained a distinct literary personality. From the very beginning, perhaps because he was a comparatively late starter, a complete writer is apparent. Not only that, but certain features which are to recur throughout his professional life are at once to the fore. These may be summarised as follows. Llewelyn was concerned to present himself, and invites and even requires his readers to look upon him as a rather special character, with heightened sensibilities and a fine inquisitiveness, whose opinions and reactions are of interest in their own right. He demands that his readers take for granted his paganism. His tuberculosis is a perpetual threat to him, and this too they are expected to keep in mind. Lastly, he wants them always to remember that he is a Powys, and in each succeeding book anticipates their recalling what he has written earlier of his brothers, his parents, even his friends. A reader of for instance *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* has to be acquainted with the fact that Llewelyn has been in a Swiss sanatorium, that he once managed a sheep farm in Africa and was there impressed by life's precariousness, and that

his family home was in Montacute where a very special kind of environment had been created. He needs to know who John and Theodore are, and—just as pertinently—the social standing of the Powys family.

In modern slang terms, Llewelyn was trying to "sell himself". In addition to persuading us that his was an interesting mind, he wanted to impress upon us that he was not only a competent but a classically masterful manipulator of the English language. He reiterates the fact that he had always wanted to be a writer, and we are conscious as we read that this is no casual narrator but a conscientious literary craftsman availing himself of whatever materials were to hand—whether they be his own life experiences or the writings of another—in order to further him in his chosen profession. In the autobiographical volumes we are given very clearly to understand that the portrayed Llewelyn Powys of Montacute, of Clavadel and of Africa, even though he had published nothing, was above and before all else a writer. It can be said also that the Llewelyn of these earlier writings, the "I" of his narratives, is a being under close observation, and that to some extent Llewelyn Powys was creating "Llewelyn Powys".

This is a very dangerous procedure. The mere fact that "I" happened to observe something, which put "me" in mind of something else, is not necessarily of interest to the reader. Happily inanity is comfortably at a distance for most of the time, and in some ways *Black Laughter*, *Skin for Skin* and *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* are Llewelyn's most satisfying books. Other than the author's prose style and his narrative skills, the reasons for their being successful are very simple: the fact that Llewelyn himself is an attractive person, the fact that his African and other experiences are unusual, and the fact that the splendid personalities of the members of Llewelyn's own family are so frequently introduced.

After the writing of *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* there followed what might be described as a sub-period in Llewelyn's writing. This involved only two books:

*Henry Hudson* (1927), written in 1926-27, and *Apples Be Ripe* (1930), written quickly in 1928. Neither book displays Llewelyn in a very accomplished vein, and it is something which is worth taking into account that during a period of almost three years, with the exception of a handful of essays, these were his only published writings. It is clear that this was a difficult and significant time for him. It is as though once he had worked out his earlier autobiographical vein Llewelyn was at a loss what to write next. He produced the biography of Hudson to commission, and it can hardly be advanced that it was a subject or a medium that he would have thought of for himself. *Apples Be Ripe*, although from a biographical point of view it is a curious document, can only be described as an experiment which failed. These three years, although not sterile, are lacking in orientation.

It is worth giving a little attention to the two books which came out of them, though, because the fact that neither of them is a success does tell us something about Llewelyn. Malcolm Elwin put forward quite extravagant claims on behalf of *Henry Hudson*, and on the strength of it declared that "lack of reasonable encouragement . . . lost to English literature more than one biographical masterpiece".<sup>3</sup> He wrote about the exhaustive research" which Llewelyn carried out, and yet the book actually contains little in the way of new material, and the documentary evidence is handled almost amateurishly. What can be said in the book's favour is that it is written in Llewelyn's customary fine style and that its many asides render it significant for his own biography if not for that of its subject. The following passage is a digression prompted by the account of Hudson's sailing up the famous river and his conversations with the Indians:

One likes to think of Hudson thus, indulgent, good-humoured, sitting on a bulrush mat, at ease in the simple habitation of these people, the memory of whom haunts our minds whenever we escape from the shrill importunity of modern American life into the

wild woods . . . I have scrambled through the underbrush of the Catskill Mountains, by ferny hollow and murmuring stream; and as my feet pressed down the leaf-mould, overmuffled with creeping arbutus, I have been aware of them and their long past, brushing against my consciousness like an echo, like the wind in the pine needles . . . Here by this rocky ridge on the Montoma hillside, puissant men bent their bows, strung with the sinews of animals, against wolf and bear. Here, from this high lawn, artless uncommunicative boys, with the insupportable ardour of youth in their blood, watched the round shining sun rise over a landscape wide and free.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of *Apples Be Ripe* it is only possible to agree with Malcolm Elwin that the book reads like the hurried production that it was. It can be seen as a harbinger for the subsequent propounder of passionately maintained doctrines, but there is no subtlety in the way in which these doctrines are made to influence the actions of the hero. Nor should it be necessary for a novelist to *explain* that his hero is attracted to a young woman principally out of lust, and that this has given rise to idealisation.

It is not so much Llewelyn's lack of imagination which renders the book unsubtle, as that its author, although he was insatiably curious by nature, lacked the ability to see below the surface of things, and in particular to fathom human character. Like William Blake he could write sorrowfully of the woe that he detected in the faces of passers-by, but whereas Blake was capable of entering into the thoughts of a sufferer Llewelyn had no such capacity. Likewise, in disapproving of the twentieth century's industrial ethos Llewelyn completely failed to reflect that some of our particular civilisation's most obedient upholders are in fact among its greatest loathers and yet regard themselves as powerless to alter things.

These traits are apparent in Llewelyn's more propagandistic writings, which taken together can be regarded as forming a second period in his output. With certain overlaps, this period covers the years 1928-34, and yielded the following books: *The*

*Cradle of God* (1929), *The Pathetic Fallacy* (1930), *A Pagan's Pilgrimage* (1931), *Impassioned Clay* (1931), *Damnably Opinions* (1935), and certain shorter writings, including *Glory of Life* (1934). In these works the autobiographical "Llewelyn Powys" of period one, after some three years gestation, has given birth to a new Llewelyn, one whose views attracted abuse as well as enthusiasm.

Llewelyn journeyed to Palestine in 1928 in order to write a commissioned travel book, but this he produced only after writing two quite different works, and when it came out *A Pagan's Pilgrimage* presented to the public a narrator disappointingly different from that of *Black Laughter*. The new "I" is a preacher, the denouncer of organised religion, the committed affirmer of life's wonder. The Llewelyn of *A Pagan's Pilgrimage* is self-consciously a sage, and the meditations we are invited to reflect upon are those not so much of a personality as of a propounder. Unfortunately the technique is not altogether successful. When Llewelyn writes such lines as "this peculiarity of the seaport I observed",<sup>5</sup> even though the reader appreciates the implication of a Llewelynian observation he is tempted to shrug and reflect that so would any traveller have observed it.

During this second period the "I" of Llewelyn's books is different because it is burdened with the doctrines. It is scarcely necessary to review those doctrines in detail, and they can be summarised as follows. There is no god, there is no life after death, and the true purpose of life is personal happiness. A "poetic vision of life" is "the highest guerdon of each passionate intellectual spirit".<sup>6</sup> Poetry itself is defined as "a heightened awareness of existence, an intensity of conscious emotion, an intensity of conscious thought".<sup>7</sup> In a letter probably written in 1933, Llewelyn speculated: "the secret is to live each day as if it were your last and as if you were going to live forever!"<sup>8</sup> Although not at variance with man's religious instinct in its unencumbered form, and particularly not with his instinct to pray, Llewelyn's

"Poetic Faith" demanded the sweeping aside of all artificial trappings, and the acknowledgement that morality "has no tap-root in earth life", and in the last analysis is "simply a matter of taste".<sup>9</sup> Cruelty is the cardinal, if not the only sin. We should trust to our senses.

The core of this second period is the trilogy of *The Cradle of God*, *The Pathetic Fallacy* and *Impassioned Clay*, the purpose of which is to denounce organised Christianity in its role of moraliser. In *The Cradle of God*, which paraphrases the Bible, Llewelyn is concerned to trace the origins of Christianity in Judaism; in *The Pathetic Fallacy* he carries forward the story to modern times, and because it deals with the history of the Christian church it is more central to his anti-religious doctrines. It is far more propagandistic than *The Cradle of God*, although even that remarkable book is not unmarred by the propagandist's tell-tale scoffing—which is something rather different from irony. "It is apparent that in those days the Lord was extremely authoritative", Llewelyn observed in the latter work. "He was always speaking things to Samuel 'in his ear'; and if there was the slightest swerving from the directions given, 'a worry' was sure to follow".<sup>10</sup> Again, retelling the story of Moses and the burning bush, he wrote:

With the indolent curiosity of a solitary herdsman . . . he sauntered over to the place. Behold! It was the God of Abraham, the God of that dead man in the inner cave, who had bethought him of this primitive method of attracting attention. The moaning and groaning of the Hebrews 'by reason of their bondage' had reached his ears.<sup>11</sup>

In order to support his denunciations Llewelyn realised that he had to carry his examination much further back in time and begin his enquiries with the world's origin and the evolving of human life. This he did in *Impassioned Clay*, and continued by tracing the development of thinking man, his succumbence to superstition, and the invention of religion. The book's drawback is that because it is short it cannot hope to tackle weighty astronomical and

evolutionary matters anything other than superficially. It is its superbly eloquent and celebratory prose which raises it to the level of a minor masterpiece; although it should not be lost sight of that the prose itself does draw its inspiration from the doctrines it expounds.

Although it was during this second period in his work that Llewelyn was most pronouncedly and unrepentantly a propagandist, he in fact continued to be so until the end of his life. One quotation from *Damnable Opinions* will serve to illustrate his technique:

How desperate is our need for this revaluation of values! . . . We should grow less involved in society and more deeply involved in existence. With exultant minds we should contemplate the stream of life. Worldly considerations, worldly pleasures, work prompted by the acquisitive impulse, have utterly shamed us; half of us live like drones, and the other half like slaves. We have made use of the meanest human gratifications to found our commonwealths upon, and shock after shock after shock is required to teach us to change our manners.<sup>12</sup>

Most of Llewelyn's proclamations concern the different aspects of his own "Poetic Faith". They are oft-propounded, and do therefore lose some of their immediacy when his work is taken as a whole. To some extent, however, this is irrelevant, for like almost every propagandist Llewelyn was confined largely to preaching to the already converted. Indeed the only malleable audience available to the propagandist is the young, and it was for this reason, in book after book, that Llewelyn apostrophised youth in the most impassioned terms. Nor was the policy without its effect. "I determined that here was the preacher for me", remembered Kenneth Hopkins of the occasion of his first reading *Impassioned Clay*,<sup>13</sup> and judging from the number of young people who wrote to Llewelyn during the 1930s, both to express their appreciation of his writings and to seek advice, he was but one of many affected in the same way.

The final period in Llewelyn's work embraces roughly the last five years of his life. It yielded many publications but only one work which was book-length, and even that originated in the second period. For the rest, Llewelyn now contented himself with the writing of essays which filled up no fewer than six volumes. It would be churlish to offer criticism of *Dorset Essays* (1935) and *Somerset Essays* (1937), the two best known collections, for to many people these volumes epitomise Llewelyn's work. But the word "charm" is that which most easily occurs to one in connection with them. They abound in it; and just as something which is charming can become slightly tedious if met with in abundance, so these two volumes are for dipping into. Despite occasional preciousness, they are successful in that context, and do evoke the people, the places and the period which they describe.

In a letter to Claude Colleer Abbott of 1938 Llewelyn explained that for years he had been "trying to catch in words the feeling that comes with the first hearing of the cuckoo".<sup>14</sup> He had often tried to strike "the particular romantic ballad note in prose", he had earlier informed the same correspondent.<sup>15</sup> In the latter of these aims Llewelyn does not seem to have been very frequently successful, but in the former he certainly was, and it is for this reason, and on the strength of his country essays, that he is sometimes called a poet who wrote prose. It is perhaps not inappropriate, indeed, to compare Llewelyn with the poet Andrew Young, who was also concerned to describe country phenomena in accurate and graceful language. There are countless instances to support this view; this is how Llewelyn describes owls in a piece entitled "Witcombe Bottoms": "strange creatures with the sagacious physiognomies of experienced octogenarian goblins hidden in feathers softer than lamb's wool, their clutching pounces as thin and curved as scimitars".<sup>16</sup>

In his preface to *Somerset Essays* Llewelyn summed up the virtues of that book and the earlier *Dorset Essays* when he explained:

. . . it has been my endeavour through meditations upon the past, and through memories of my own life-experience, to catch at moods common to all reflective country-bred people who feel themselves emotionally attached to cities, villages, roads, lanes, and fields familiar to them since childhood.<sup>17</sup>

Allowing himself as much licence in that intent as he did in his observation of county boundaries, that is what Llewelyn achieved in these two volumes. In just a handful of the essays, however, not more than a dozen all told, including one or two from *A Baker's Dozen* (1941), we witness during this last period a re-emergence of the Llewelyn of the first period, the author of *Black Laughter* and *Skin for Skin*. It is in these that the books' principal attraction resides. They are snippets of autobiography, dwelling exclusively on Llewelyn's childhood, that make one wish he had attempted a full volume devoted to his boyhood and early young-manhood, a volume that in point of time would have preceded *Skin for Skin*. We would then have had four autobiographical volumes covering his life to the age of forty. As it is we lack the first, and can only feel gratitude for the existence of this sprinkling of essays (and of course the digressions elsewhere) in which the atmosphere of the Montacute years is caught sharply and with unashamed nostalgia. The following excerpt from the piece entitled "Heroes out of the Past" sums up the flavour of these too few pieces:

There we knew in the familiar village, with its tall church, its Abbey Gateway, and its Borough, our father, so utterly unlike any schoolmaster, was going in and out of the cottage doors of his parish, and after enjoying his walk in the late afternoon returning punctually to his family tea, a strong, baffling, nay, seemingly invincible safeguard against all the vulgarities and miseries that we had learned to connect with the outside world.<sup>18</sup>

John Cowper Powys understood better than anybody his brother's true genius. In 1932 he wrote to him pressing him to write "another book in the style of *Skin for Skin*", not dissimilar to the volume whose non-production has just been lamented.<sup>19</sup>

Instead, just over a year later, on October 27, 1933, Llewelyn began his first draft of the "Imaginary Autobiography", *Love and Death* (1939). It is clear that the idea of it had been in his mind for some time, for Alyse Gregory recorded in her journal for January 5, 1931: "He is going to write his experiences. Let me think of this also as a test of my love".<sup>20</sup> Llewelyn's letters to Gamel Woolsey,<sup>21</sup> the Dittany Stone of the book, suggest a slightly earlier date still for the idea's conception.

At the beginning of 1931 Llewelyn and Alyse were in the United States and Gamel in England, and three years had elapsed since Llewelyn and the latter had met in New York. During that period Gamel had twice lost a child by Llewelyn, followed him to England in the interval, and met and agreed to marry Gerald Brenan. There was certainly substance for a book, and indeed from Llewelyn's letters to Gamel it is possible to deduce what kind of a book it would have become had it been written at that early date. A letter of November 21, 1930, in which Llewelyn relates a dream in which the two of them meet in the country and go to a cottage where they make love, is clearly a trial draft for a section of the book he had in mind—a dream book. The following is a brief excerpt:

'There's a cottage ready for us,' you said, 'I was preparing it all last night.' . . . And you told me that the evening before, when you were coming away from the cottage, you had watched a white unicorn with its foal grazing there in the moonlight. 'Come,' you said, 'I will show you their hoof marks.' They were larger than an elk's, uncloven but at the same time pointed . . . *I could not wait*. You gave me such a kiss and such a pouting look with dancing mocking love in your eyes because I had interrupted your talk . . . Your cottage had a hedge about it and a lawn with a pear tree in the corner. We had almost reached the door when I heard an extraordinary growling. 'It's my wyvern,' you said, 'it guards my house.'<sup>22</sup>

The entire dream sequence was reproduced, in an abbreviated version in which the wyvern has become a fox-hound, in *Love and Death* itself, begun three years

later but not revised and completed until 1937-8. Another letter of the same month suggests that the river outing sequence in *Love and Death* was also already in Llewelyn's mind at this date, and in both letter and book Llewelyn takes a volume of Landor from his pocket and reads from it to Gamel, subsequently Dittany.

The affair which gave birth to this principal work to emerge from Llewelyn's third period introduces to any consideration of it a curious paradox. Reading the letters which Llewelyn wrote to Gamel, it is impossible not to conclude that the love which they celebrate was somehow make-believe, and not at all as genuine as Llewelyn either said or apparently believed. There is indeed an unsavoury juxtaposition between the genuineness of the anguish expressed in Alyse's journal over the Llewelyn-Gamel relationship and the rather mannered self-indulgence of the letters to Gamel, their passion and despair notwithstanding, and despite Gertrude Powys's assertion to Mr. Brennan that "the love between Llewelyn and Gamel transcended all other loves, having something supernatural that could never be quenched".<sup>23</sup>

It would be unproductive to dwell at length on this suggestion, but it does seem that after the initial coming together Llewelyn began to utilise the relationship towards the making of a book, autobiographical and semi-fiction, with as its theme Love; and that in his letters to Gamel he both consciously rehearsed ideas for the book *and* used them to keep fresh about his own person the aura of being in love and being loved which he knew to be necessary to the work's successful realisation. The book however was abandoned at its first attempt, and it is noticeable that by that time Llewelyn's letters to Gamel had become markedly less passionate. Speaking generally, they never again achieved the lyrical abandon of the early years, though there was some resuscitation of it in those letters written from Switzerland during Llewelyn's final years, after he had begun work on the

second version of *Love and Death*. (Gamel indeed visited Llewelyn just before he took up the old manuscript.) It is perhaps not altogether wrong to suggest that the Llewelyn of this love affair is the same Llewelyn who as a young man complained so bitterly about how his middle-class background disallowed him from "having" girls, who duly became engaged to the first suitable young woman he encountered, and who from Africa wrote bawdy letters to Louis Wilkinson about his dealings with the native girls even though he was far too afraid of the pox ever to avail himself of them.

In a letter to Gamel written after the publication of *Love and Death*, Llewelyn declared: "they all praise and wonder at Dittany, and this gives me great delight, as if I had managed to catch something of your grace of mind and loveliness of body".<sup>24</sup> In fact, though, we learn surprisingly little about Dittany from the book, and what we do learn is not altogether endearing. The following are quotations from all those passages in *Love and Death* that have direct bearing on the heroine's character. The first is simple description:

There was always something mediaeval about Dittany, a mediaeval intermingling of childishness and extreme sophistication. And this impression that she really and truly had been born out of due time was strengthened when you saw her eyes that were, whenever her oval face was in repose, of the same narrow level shape that belongs to the eyes of the heavy-gowned ladies to be seen on the illuminated parchment pictures of the old manuscripts.<sup>25</sup>

Later we learn: "to Dittany our real world was her shadow-world and our shadow-world was her actual world" (48). Soon after that we are told of her "unpredictable world of dreams" (50). We read too that "Her advance possessed no hint of resolution in it" (58), and of "her absentminded ways, her misty eyes" (98). Most tellingly, we come across Llewelyn's hurt reaction: "She was in love with being loved and that was all" (197). Lastly, after he has lost Dittany to Pixley, we find

Llewelyn reflecting: "Silence was her way of treating any embarrassing crisis. Her not writing was her way of telling me" (258).

Guardedly, in her introduction to the book, Alyse Gregory was tempted to describe it as "not a wholly satisfying presentation of those rendings of the human heart that instruct our proud intellects, or send us prematurely to our graves".<sup>26</sup> She found it instead a simple "love rhapsody": and her view lends support to the suggestion that Llewelyn's love for Gamel was to some extent just as imaginary as the "autobiography" he founded upon it. "*Love and Death*, see how you drew that out of me", Llewelyn wrote to Gamel just six weeks before his death, "my best book out of my very marrow—because you *were* my marrow".<sup>27</sup> Yet as has been indicated, it is the "marrow" part of the book, the character of its heroine, which is its least substantial attribute.

Throughout the affair with Gamel, Llewelyn appears genuinely not to have realised what tragic unhappiness he was causing to Alyse, and that he was guilty of what he himself had nominated the cardinal sin, cruelty. He could not of course have been *completely* unaware of the selfishness of his actions, and there are several instances in his contemporaneous writings when his proclamations concerning sexual freedom now seem rather like self-excusing. "It may be seldom right to commit adultery", he wrote in 1929, "but again it may not always be reprehensible to indulge in so complicated a pastime".<sup>28</sup> Or later, in 1930 or 1931, on the torment of jealousy:

That glance was meant for him; he purposely touched her elbow as he went through that

gate. They have been kissing; nay, this very moment, behind that closed door, he is lightly uplifting the hem of her frock. Let it go, cast it out of your head. If what you dread is true, nothing will hold them from the fond exercise of 'pretty wrongs'.<sup>29</sup>

It is impossible, therefore, not to censure Llewelyn in some measure, and to add to the other criticisms that have been raised during the course of this essay the accusation of at the very least naïvety. It would be but a step from there to challenge the sincerity of all of Llewelyn's writings in which his denunciatory and affirmatory doctrines are expounded, and then to dismiss them as exercises in rhetoric the principal redeeming feature of which is their fine prose style. Yet this would be most unjustified. Llewelyn's "Poetic Faith", his Epicureanism, remains perfectly valid as a guide for the conduct of human life. Llewelyn himself did not claim to be an original thinker—indeed he was far from being a philosopher—and declared candidly that he regarded himself as no more than the latest exponent of certain rationalistic doctrines that are as old as the human race. His early autobiographical works, and his masterpiece *Love and Death*, have distinct merits all their own; but quite apart from them it is by no means inappropriate to sum up Llewelyn's achievement on the strength of his more doctrinal output. "In every generation", he wrote in his essay on the Book of Ecclesiastes, "there are found men and women who derive spiritual refreshment from uncompromising words spoken without fear".<sup>30</sup> Llewelyn himself, in his own generation, provided just such "uncompromising words".

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Llewelyn Powys*, ed. L. Wilkinson, 1943, p. 178.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- <sup>3</sup> Malcolm Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, 1946, p. 183.
- <sup>4</sup> *Henry Hudson*, 1927, p. 107.
- <sup>5</sup> *A Pagan's Pilgrimage*, 1931, p. 37.
- <sup>6</sup> *Damnably Opinions*, 1935, p. 90.
- <sup>7</sup> *Rats in the Sacristy*, 1937, p. 83.
- <sup>8</sup> Malcolm Elwin, *The Life*, p. 219.
- <sup>9</sup> *Damnably Opinions*, p. 75.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Cradle of God*, 1929, p. 71.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>12</sup> P. 53.
- <sup>13</sup> Llewelyn Powys, *Advice to a Young Poet. The Correspondence between Llewelyn Powys and Kenneth Hopkins*, ed. R.L. Blackmore, Cranbury, N.J., 1969, p. 196.
- <sup>14</sup> *Letters*, ed. L. Wilkinson, p. 267.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- <sup>16</sup> *Somerset Essays*, p. 159.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- <sup>18</sup> *Dorset Essays*, pp. 150-151.
- <sup>19</sup> Malcolm Elwin, *The Life*, p. 218.
- <sup>20</sup> Alyse Gregory, *The Cry of a Gull. Journals 1923-1948*, ed. M. Adam, Brushford, Somerset, 1973.
- <sup>21</sup> Llewelyn Powys, *So Wild a Thing. Letters to Gamel Woolsey*, ed. M. Elwin, Brushford, Somerset, 1973.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46. The elisions are those of the editor.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>25</sup> *Love and Death*, 1939, pp. 35-36. Numerals in parentheses in my subsequent discussion refer to pages in this edition.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
- <sup>27</sup> *So Wild a Thing*, p. 93.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Cradle of God*, 1929, p. 52.
- <sup>29</sup> *Impassioned Clay*, 1931, pp. 113-114.
- <sup>30</sup> *Rats in the Sacristy*, 1937, p. 70.

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# Ben Jones

## The Disfigurement of Gerda: Moral and Textual Problems in *Wolf Solent*

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I am concerned in this paper with six deleted chapters of *Wolf Solent*, chapters which present an event not included in the final version of the novel, which show alternative developments of certain characters, and which suggest an approach to Wolf's dilemma substantially different from that in the final version. Since my examination of manuscript material for *Wolf Solent* extends only to the six chapters, I cannot offer a definitive interpretation of the complete text nor of the making of the novel. The relationship of these chapters to typescripts of the American and British editions, or to other manuscripts, remains to be established. The chapters are, to my mind, significant in the primary event they narrate, the disfigurement of Gerda, in the responses this event causes in Wolf and Christie, and in the attempted resolutions Powys sought in his narrative.

The six chapters are autograph manuscripts held in the George Arent Research Library at Syracuse University, New York.<sup>1</sup> They were, according to the Syracuse Library, acquired from Phyllis Playter. When I first visited the collection it was not catalogued, so I experienced some surprise when amidst the opening of ordinary buff-coloured envelopes I came across the following passage:

Among the troubled human shapes that fluttered across the threshold of his consciousness . . . advancing and receding, taking form and fading . . . the shape that remained most persistent was not today that face on the Waterloo steps; but, on the contrary, the face of Gerda . . . the face of Gerda patched and plastered with abominable strips of lint-bandages . . . the face of Gerda despoiled and disfigured for life!<sup>2</sup>

Later, Wolf describes the event to Christie:

"I found her alone and self-possessed, but with her face badly cut and bleeding . . . She said she ran out into the backyard. She must have been furiously angry and wrought up. I suppose accidents happen at any moment but I can't believe she would have tripped over the wood Lobbie brought if she hadn't been upset over something. At any rate she fell face downwards . . . full length . . . with all her weight . . . She must have tried to shield her face with her arm . . . but it was her cheek that was terribly cut . . . and the nail must have been rusty; for after a day or two it got worse; and I was so frightened that I made her go to the hospital." (1008-09)

Christie responds to Wolf in a state of shock, but not over Gerda's misfortune so much as her own. She sees immediately what Wolf does not see, or chooses not to see: that her love for Wolf, and his for her, has no chance if Gerda's beauty is lost. Pity will replace love. The duality of the relationship will have been lost, and with it Christie's role as Gerda's opposite. Wolf and Christie, after a long and difficult discussion, separate, isolated from each other. Wolf, with that remarkable and sometimes exasperating resiliency which seems to characterize his personality, returns home vowing devotion to Gerda, but she too rejects him, and at the end of the chapter (XIX in the manuscript) he is totally alone, looking out "into the silence of Preston Lane" (1029).

The manuscript chapters 19-24 cover a period of about two months, from November when Gerda's accident takes place, to New Year's Day. In the final version, a single chapter (XIX, entitled "Wine") covers the same period, up to the end of the year, when Wolf goes back to Urquhart. The main events in the six manuscript chapters are as follows. Wolf

and Christie go on an outing to Melbury Bub, and Wolf tells her, first, about his decision to break with Urquhart, then about Gerda's accident. Christie's reaction is stronger than Wolf anticipated, and it results in the estrangement. Wolf returns to Gerda, vowing devotion, but she repulses him. She returns to her parents' home for three weeks to recover. Wolf attempts a reconciliation with Christie, but he is not successful. He proposes an "arrangement" with Gerda: he will quit Christie if Gerda will quit Bob Weevil. Gerda refuses. Then follows a succession of confrontations with his mother, with Christie, with Urquhart, and others, which seem to be leading nowhere and which indicate the frustration Powys found himself in as he tried to conclude the novel. Only Wolf's decision to return to Urquhart carries the narrative forward. The manuscript chapters come to an end with a New Year's Eve party and a walk on New Year's Day; the signs show that the dramatic developments necessary to sustain the narrative have ceased, and that Powys, as novelist, is caught in the same predicament as Wolf: he has nowhere to go. But the deleted material informs us of Powys's efforts to explore Wolf's character. The controlling action of the novel is the dissolution of Wolf's "mythology" followed by a renewal of his energies allowing his survival in a material world. The manuscript chapters demonstrate the struggle which Powys had in shaping Wolf's threatening catastrophe into a coherent story. They reveal a series of explorations to discover the way in which this dissolution and subsequent renewal could be told.

We do have a possible explanation, perhaps only a hint, of why so much material was deleted. In his letter to Littleton Powys of 30 July 1928, printed by Belinda Humfrey in *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, he wrote:

I think it looks as if Simon and Schuster will take my book but insist on my shortening it by something like 60,000 words. And I am inclined to think I must unwillingly agree to this.<sup>3</sup>

It is possible that these are the deleted chapters, although to verify this we would have to see the typescript prepared for Simon and Schuster. The "block" deletion of six chapters at the publisher's request, although possible since the chapters fit roughly into the novel's time sequence, is less convincing than an explanation which sees these chapters as part of a more complicated revision of the book, a revision made necessary by Powys's sense of his art rather than by the exigencies of publishing. Such a revision is hinted at in a letter to Littleton written somewhat earlier, in January of 1928: "Soon the book will be done—and then I shall revise it" (*Essays*, 322). My argument here is that there are other problems causing the deletion of these chapters, problems which Powys, as an artist, made, confronted, and resolved. Louis Wilkinson's view that it "is hardly more than a slight exaggeration to say that he never, until quite late in life, revised anything he wrote," must be corrected.<sup>4</sup> More than three-hundred pages of extensively revised manuscripts were, after all, re-worked into a single chapter, and the reshaping from original to final narrative shows substantial change both in concept and technique.

In the final version of Chapter XIX, Christie proposes an evening together with Wolf while Mr. Malakite visits Weymouth, and Wolf both breaks with Urquhart and then decides to return to him. The story requires that something be done with Gerda. Her affair with Bob Weevil has not yet reached the point of infidelity, but the direction seems clear enough. Her involvement in Wolf's life cannot end in this way. Powys never solved the problem of what to do with her, but, then, neither did Wolf. Powys, like Wolf, settled for an ambiguous state of affairs in closing the novel. What he hoped ultimately to achieve by disfiguring her we cannot know, and it seems safe to guess that he himself never was certain. The disfigurement is mentioned less and less as we come to the closing of the deleted chapters. It is possible that in the process of discovering what his story really was, Powys

wanted to find out what consequences such an act might have. There seems no doubt, however, that at one point in the composition, Gerda's injury was of primary importance. What were the reasons for this?

First, there is Powys's repulsion from physical injury, his anti-sadism. But we know, partly from reading Powys, that repulsion and attraction are closely related. Powys has made known his own tendencies towards sadism, and we can safely conclude from his confrontation of this tendency in *A Glastonbury Romance* and in *Autobiography* that the late 1920s and early 1930s were years of intense self-examination concerning this aspect of his mental life. Physical injury and acts of violence were repulsive to him, but in his fiction he did not resist confronting them. The destruction of living nature was to Wolf, as it was to Powys, horrifying. We know that Powys's repulsion from vivisection developed more extensively after *Wolf Solent*, but it exists clearly enough in Wolf's attitude toward nature, in his repeated lamentation of what motor cars and airplanes were doing to the beauty of Dorset's land. The point is made early in the novel, on the train ride to Ramsgard:

He felt as though, with aeroplanes spying down upon every retreat like ubiquitous vultures, with the lanes invaded by iron-clad motors like colossal beetles, with no sea, no lake, no river free from throbbing, thudding engines, the one thing most precious of all in the world was being steadily assassinated.

In the dusty, sunlit space of that small tobacco-stained carriage he seemed to see, floating and helpless, an image of the whole round earth! And he saw it bleeding and victimized, like a smooth-bellied, vivisectioned frog. He saw it scooped and gouged and harrowed. He saw it hawked at out of the humming air. He saw it netted in a quivering entanglement of vibrations, heaving and shuddering under the weight of iron and stone.<sup>5</sup>

In the early chapters of the novel, Gerda is very much a part of this world of living nature; she is its human representation, particularly at those times of her bird whistling:

That strange whistling was the voice of those green pastures and those blackthorn-hedges, not as they were when human beings were conscious of them, but as they were in that indescribable hour just before dawn, when they awoke in the darkness to hear the faint, faint stirrings—upon the air—of the departing of the non-human powers of the night! (*Wolf Solent*, 111)

She becomes nature, and a violation of her is a violation of nature, and she is the inevitable victim of "*that which underlies all evil*" (*Wolf Solent*, 186), a victim of the dark forces which Wolf envisions at times in the novel, a sign of living nature threatened by the mystery of the unpredictable cosmos. She is a special sign because her beauty is flawless. Immediately after Gerda's first enchantment of Wolf by her blackbird's song in Chapter Five, Wolf is struck by the particular flawlessness of her beauty, particularly her face:

If only—so he thought to himself later—Gerda's face had been a little less flawless in its beauty, the beauty of her body would have remained as maddening to his senses as it was at the beginning. But the more he had seen of her the more beautiful her face had grown; until it had now reached that magical level of loveliness which absorbs with a kind of absoluteness the whole aesthetic sense, paralysing the erotic sensibility. (*Wolf Solent*, 100-101)

This passage from the final version anticipates, perhaps demands, the marring of Gerda's beauty, and it suggests that Powys from early on in the writing of the novel had in mind the subsequent disfigurement. In the deleted Chapter XIX, this sense of "absoluteness" comes back to Wolf as he tries to work himself up to tell Christie the full extent of Gerda's injury:

It was from that bandaged face that a cloud of chilly vapour had materialized between their two souls! He lifted up his voice and plunged on, struggling to regain their lost rapport by making play with this other emotion . . . "What I think," he said slowly, "is that real beauty is more than an artistic thing. Its more than a mathematical thing. Its an *absolute*! (998)

Wolf's consciousness returns repeatedly to Gerda's perfect face. She destroys "All ordinary human relations" (*Wolf Solent*, 66). Her beauty is "absolute in its flawlessness" (*Wolf Solent*, 70). Wolf, we are told, "had never seen, in picture, in marble, or in life, anything as flawless as the loveliness" revealed to him in Gerda (*Wolf Solent*, 107). The very excesses of her beauty—that is to say, the excesses of the language in which she exists in Wolf's consciousness—are ominous, and that she should suffer some outrage against her beauty is, if intolerable, nevertheless consistent with the role that has been set for her in the story. As she is flawlessly beautiful, so is she threatened. Repelled by the sadistic violation of living matter, Powys was compelled to dramatize it, using, in this case, the most physically beautiful object he ever created.

A second reason for disfiguring Gerda can be related to Wolf's affair with Christie. If we place the event in the sequence of action developing in the novel we see that Wolf's relation to Christie is moving towards a crisis. The balanced opposition of Gerda and Christie—Gerda the flawless bodily lover and Christie the perfect spiritual lover—must be broken if the dramatic integrity of the novel, not to say the moral integrity of Wolf, is to continue. This balancing of dual forces is of extreme importance to Wolf, as it was to Powys, and I think there is no doubt but that Powys was trying to work out in his own mind the organization of a universe which revealed itself in such ambiguities. Wolf's "life-illusion" is based on a secret mythology of struggle, a mythology that seemed to be expressing itself in his relations to Gerda and Christie: "He had let Christie become a spirit to him. He himself . . . had turned her into a spirit. Men of his type make their girls into anything. He had made her what he wanted her. He had satisfied his sensuality with the one and gone to Christie for mental sympathy" (*Wolf Solent*, 431). But Wolf's own constant self-analysis tells him that with all the strangeness of his fragmented loves, his work for Urquhart, his at-

tachment to his mother, his relation to Mattie Smith and to the Otters, he is becoming increasingly remote from real life. We recall that Gerda's beauty itself, in Wolf's own words, destroys "All ordinary human relations" (*Wolf Solent*, 66). Some act, even if it be a violent one, is needed to bring him back from his fragmented state, from the state of disorganized sensuality and debilitated consciousness. Disfiguring Gerda might do this. Gerda's classic and sculptured beauty, if marred, would become human. If the illusory duality were broken, Christie's role would change; she too could become humanized. Powys was probing for a way to shake off Wolf's "life-illusion", hopefully to humanize Wolf's world, but the probe in these manuscript chapters was unsuccessful. The marring of Gerda's beauty raised new problems, particularly in the development of Christie's character. After hearing Wolf's stumbling narration of Gerda's accident,

Christie removed her fingers from the stick at her side and pulled her skirt down over her ankles shaking off two or three dead leaves. She sat straight up now and it was her turn to clasp her hands over her knees. "I don't know what to say, Wolf. I don't know what to say. Is her face . . . is it scarred?" "That's the worst of it—yes, that's the awful thing." "Well then . . . you mean it will be . . ." (1010)

They prepare to leave, their close association broken:

Now as she stood facing him, very slim and straight, her small oval chin raised, her brown eyes dark and ominously steady under her arched eyebrows, he recognized that however much any pair of human souls may depend on each other, their two separate consciousnesses, their two separate prides, can never be entirely counted on. "There it is—we must face it," he said with resolute directness. The Doctor says she's bound to be disfigured . . . badly disfigured . . . whatever they do. But of course he may (be) wrong—I suppose its possible—" He sighed; but the sigh was in part for himself, for he saw a film of inexplicable resentment, like a film of frost in autumn, gather upon the surface of the two brown eyes into whose depths he was anxiously staring—

"Poor Gerda!" he murmured, sighing again. It was what he saw gathering in those mysterious amber-coloured pools that made these words sound hollow. It would have been much better for him at that moment if he'd murmured "damn Gerda!" "*Poor Gerda!*" echoed Christie with the barest perceptible movement of her lips but with a sarcasm that was blighting. Her eyes were darkening visibly now and her eye brows were raised so high that little puckers appeared in the skin of her white forehead. Her whole frame seemed stiffening as she stared at him. Her hands clutched each other behind her back. "What's the matter, Chris?" he murmured. "You look as if I'd done this thing to Gerda." "It isn't what you've done. It's the way you feel now!" "What's the matter, Chris?" he murmured. "What have I done?" "It isn't what you've done. I don't believe you know what it is to feel . . . to actually realize another human being's feeling . . . When you say 'poor Gerda!' in the tone you did just now I feel as if your pity and sympathy were worth nothing at all . . . to anyone!" (1011a-1012a)

This is a view of Christie surprisingly different from what she is in the final version. She is, in some ways, much more interesting. Certainly she is more jealous, more self-assertive, more passionate, than the quiet and submissive girl, defeated in love, even humiliated, who goes off to Weymouth with Olwen. Just as Powys probed to discover what would happen to Gerda if she lost her beauty, so he probed to find out what would happen to Christie if the energy found in her love for Wolf were ever released. The balanced duality which Wolf hoped could survive has collapsed—both Gerda and Christie have ceased playing roles in his secret game.

Another passage in the manuscript tells us more about Christie, showing us how different she is from what she becomes in the final version. Wolf tries for a reconciliation with her, but she, in the interval, has seen and "had it out" (1132a) with Gerda, and she sees, if Wolf does not, the moral dilemma which confronts them:

"But something's happened now, that's changed everything. I knew it at Melbury Bub. I knew it clearly. You haven't been

honest with me. You've changed without telling me you've changed. I *know*, now I've seen Gerda; so its no good your saying anything! There was no treachery to her before in what we felt. But there *is* treachery now! Its become a different thing. Gerda and I are sharing your pity. That's what it is! A pity's the only kind of love you're capable of! And now we're sharing it. She so much . . . I so much . . ." (1132b)

After such outbursts as these, in which Christie reveals her own strong feelings, and her own intuitions, striking so accurately at Wolf's selfishness and cruelty, at his betrayal of Gerda, it is somewhat disappointing to find her saying "I've come to the conclusion, Wolf, that I must be more frank as well as more philosophical about what I feel for you" (1182), and arranging to meet Wolf some night when, as Wolf speculates, "the old man was provided for" (1182), a scene which, as we know, does appear in the final version. By the end of the deleted chapters Christie is tamed down enough to become the docile and submissive girl she is in the final version. Much is lost in changing Christie. Perhaps we see her re-emerging in *Porius* as Morfydd, passionate, intuitive, cunning and mysterious. The effort to de-spiritualize Christie was, however, dropped—*necessarily*, if the novel was to remain in focus on Wolf and his dilemma.

The deleted chapters unfold a series of events edging towards the extremities of experience. They show Powys searching out various possibilities, letting them develop along their own lines until they either become the story which he wishes to tell, or they lead in directions which are too dangerous, too diversionary, or too obscure to explore. For example, deleted Chapter XIX includes a long explanation by Wolf of his break with Urquhart. There is mention of a "pornographical" book which Wolf refused to use for their history of Dorset but to which he was personally attracted, so much so that after spending an afternoon reading it, he became sick. In the final version it is the Squire's obsessions which are so troublesome; in the deleted chapter it is

Wolf's own obsession which is emphasized: an important shift in focus.

Grotesque incidents occur, masquerades which build up a world of nightmarish fantasy. While Wolf waits for Gerda's return to Preston Lane after he has left Christie, his mind wanders to the Lesbian scene he observed (or thought he observed) on the night of the School Treat, then to Bob Weevil's flirtation with the "automatic young lady" from *The Farmer's Rest*, then to Mr. Malakite's incest. Wolf "felt as if the manias of all these people floated towards him like gaping, palpitating, distorted masks" (1027a-27b). And later:

As he inhaled the heavy darkness now listening . . . listening . . . he began to slide into some ghastly reciprocity with Mr. Malakite. To be suddenly able to catch that quivering light of desirableness . . . that perilous sweetness of girlhood . . . falling on limbs oneself had begotten, too well he could understand that fatal provocation! Just as the desire of girl for girl, by reason of its quivering ineffectualness had proven so maddeningly a thrust so now the worse obsession of the old bookseller began to pierce him to the quick. He seemed to be able to share at that moment every vibration of it. (1027d)

Wolf has lost control of his life-illusion, and his mind has filled itself with grotesque fantasy. The Dorset world becomes delusive, a world of masks, over which Wolf has no power. Certainly there are moments in the final version when Wolf's mind is shaken, but not to the degree that it is repeatedly shaken in the deleted chapters. We find Wolf's progress moving in more ominous directions. The chapters were deleted because Powys's explorations were proving too difficult to control, as if the fiction was becoming life itself.

Powys establishes early in the novel what the unifying action of the story is to be: the testing of Wolf's "life-illusion" against the realities of the material world, against "pig-scented" (as in the manuscript) or "rain-scented" (as in the final version) Dorset. This testing is, potentially, an affirmative experience. Wolf's original "life-illusion" is incomplete because it "had no outlet in any

sort of action" (*Wolf Solent*, 16). He faces a "new reality" (*Wolf Solent*, 17), challenging his secret life. An episode in the final version, Chapter XVI, puts the test very clearly. Jason Otter, poet and soothsayer, confronts Wolf on the subject of human happiness; he, in his candid way, raises the question of Wolf's happiness with Gerda. But Wolf remains composed and replies: "'Sleeping with people isn't everything in this world, Otter! It isn't even especially wonderful. I should have thought that being a poet you'd know that, and wouldn't go putting such importance on these material accidents!'" Jason strikes back harshly, and prophetically: "'You'll walk into a material accident that'll stir *your* quills, master,' the poet growled, 'though you *do* think yourself a sort of superior being going about among ordinary people. *You'll* walk into the wood where they pick up horns . . . clever though you may be!'" (*Wolf Solent*, 350). This statement, coming at a critical point in Wolf's development, is of considerable importance to the structure of the novel. Wolf broods on Jason's prophecy, then rebuts it:

"I refuse to believe," he said to himself, "and I never will believe, until the day Nature kills me, that there's such a thing as 'reality', apart from the mind that looks at it . . . . These trees, this old-man's-beard, these dark ditch plants . . . they all see what they've nature to see . . . No living thing has ever seen reality as it is in itself. By God! there's probably nothing to see, when you come to that!" (*Wolf Solent*, 353)

Almost immediately, Wolf hears a "rustling in the grass by the side of the road". He decides to investigate and is cut by a thorn. He knows that his rebuttal has, in turn, been effectively answered. Such a "material accident" is a challenge to his confident idealism and to his "life-illusion". Powys had in mind at one time in the composition of the novel a more terrifying "material accident": the disfigurement of Gerda. This more serious blood-wound could not be set aside, after a moment's pain, as had the thorn on the bramble. Gerda's scars challenge all of

Wolf's philosophy, and it could be the catastrophe which would, more than anything else, defeat him. No act in the final version so clearly fulfills Jason's prophecy, and I hazard the guess that Gerda's disfigurement was intended to be the fulfillment of that prophecy. The chapters built on her disfigurement point to despair, to Wolf's loss of control over his mental world, to Redfern's fate, to self-destruction.

Powys chose finally not to let the novel develop in this way. The act of writing became for Powys an act of discovery, and these chapters were of great importance to him. The consequences of Gerda's injury were leading him to desolate conclusions. In rejecting these chapters, Powys was unable to carry out his plan for reconciliation. Reconciliation, first, in Wolf's acceptance of a reality revealed in matter, in

the field of yellow buttercups and in the "pig-scented earth". But a reconciliation also in those distraught relationships which surround Wolf, between Christie and Olwen, Mattie Smith and Darnley Otter, and, perhaps most importantly, between Tilly Valley and Squire Urquhart (*Wolf Solent*, 632-33). At the end little remains of Wolf's "life-illusion", but what does remain is no longer secretive, no longer introspective, no longer inactive, and it has survived its testing by the dark forces of matter and of human experience. The novel in its final version tells of Wolf's survival with at least the remnants of belief in the creative potential of the universe. The deleted chapters tell us something of Powys's struggle, in the forge of the imagination, to shape such belief into story.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the George Arent Research Library, Syracuse University, and its staff, for assisting me; also, Francis Powys and Laurence Pollinger Ltd., for permission to use and quote from the manuscripts. The Canada Council and Churchill College, Cambridge, have been helpful to me in carrying out this work.

<sup>2</sup> Syracuse manuscript, p. 993b. Hereafter, page citations to the manuscript will be noted in the text following the reference, as: (1008-9). I have transcribed the manuscript without "normalizing" it. I have not attempted to include the many revisions which occur on every page. Powys frequently uses spaced periods ( . . . ) in the manuscript, and I have transcribed them accordingly. When I have omitted a

portion of a passage, the ellipsis is shown by unspaced periods, as . . . . The paragraphing follows the manuscript in so far as it can be determined.

<sup>3</sup> *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. Belinda Humfrey, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1972, p. 323; cited in the text as *Essays*.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, ed. Louis Wilkinson, Hamilton, N.Y., Colgate University Press, 1958, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent*, 1929, p. 12; hereafter references are cited in the text. Pagination refers in every case to this edition. As with the manuscript, Powys's spaced periods are transcribed as in the text of the novel; my ellipses are shown as unspaced periods.

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# T. J. Diffey

## John Cowper Powys and Philosophy

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This is not a comprehensive exposition of Powys's philosophy. In his philosophical books<sup>1</sup> Powys speaks so directly to his readers that the services of a commentator are not needed. The philosophy of the novels appears to be more complex,<sup>2</sup> but I shall not subject it to a systematic study here. What interests me are Powys's attitudes to philosophy, and how what I shall call his philosophy of life can be distinguished from technical or academic philosophy.

This philosophy has little to do it seems with philosophy in the colloquial meaning of the term. Academic philosophers argue "about anything from whether fire is hot to whether it is reasonable to expect religious believers to be able to justify their religious beliefs." They do not "spend their time brooding on policies for preserving peace of mind in a hazardous and disturbed world".<sup>3</sup> Powys does.<sup>4</sup> He is a philosopher in the colloquial sense. "My idea", he remarks in the *Autobiography*, "of making people happy was to create for them an atmosphere from which all criticism was eliminated".<sup>5</sup> Academic philosophy would be impossible under these conditions, and yet the idea that critical thought is the chief function of mind is *not* self-evident. Here we might recall the character in *The Inmates* who held that to suppose the mind is the organ of thinking is to misuse the mind. "The view that wisdom is attained along the path of normal health and rational sanity", Powys remarks elsewhere, has been always a "philosophical" view and never a "religious" one.<sup>6</sup> So much the worse for philosophy, is the impression Powys conveys.

In his judicious study of Powys's novels, Glen Cavaliero rightly says that all Powys's written work was really that of a preacher.<sup>7</sup>

This aptly applies to Powys's philosophy. Technical philosophy on the other hand does not preach, except in the minimal sense that any thinker seeks to persuade others of the truth of his views. But in discussing Powys's thought, about philosophical issues,<sup>8</sup> "view" is already the wrong word to use. Powys does not have "views". He has passions. "View" is a word that belongs to the language of theoretical philosophy, but Powys's philosophy is not theoretical; it is intensely practical.

Cavaliero is surely right that Powys's philosophical writings are more probably enjoyed by admirers of Powys's novels than by systematic philosophers.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Powys's concern for the practical raises questions which are of perennial importance for philosophy. Some academic philosophers—certainly James, and even Kant, who appears forbiddingly theoretical, but whose ultimate concern was practical, as Powys understood better than many academic philosophers do<sup>10</sup>—have grasped the over-riding importance of the practical. But the theoretical tradition in philosophy is so strong, that the practical tends either to be overlooked or ridiculed.<sup>11</sup>

There is no denying that typical philosophers are unlikely to read Powys,<sup>12</sup> and always excepting James, Powys did not think much of professional philosophers.<sup>13</sup> A playful irony is conspicuous in Powys's treatment of philosophers, real or fictional. Take his portrayal of Richard Gaul, the philosopher in *Weymouth Sands*,<sup>14</sup> or his description of John Locke philosophizing on the benches outside Dickory Cattle's pub.<sup>15</sup>

Nietzsche's philosophy is a good place to go for the quarrel between academic

philosophers and philosophers of life. Nietzsche held that it was an "accepted and indisputable fact" that there "exists a real irritation and rancour on the part of philosophers towards sensuality". There exists "a real philosophic bias and affection for the whole ascetic ideal".<sup>16</sup> By this reckoning Powys is the reverse of the typical philosopher. One of his books of course is called *In Defence of Sensuality*; and the idea expressed in the title of another, *The Art of Forgetting*, is not unknown to Nietzsche. "There can exist no happiness, no gladness, no hope, no pride, no real *present* without forgetfulness." "Active forgetfulness" Nietzsche says, is a "nurse of psychic order".<sup>17</sup> Even more interesting is Nietzsche's contention that art and asceticism are in fundamental antagonism. This is important to the study of Powys, first because Nietzsche takes *Homer* as the great exemplar of art, and secondly because Nietzsche thinks art is most frequently and most absolutely *corrupted* by the ascetic ideal.<sup>18</sup> If Powys's own work is largely free of asceticism, we may have an important clue here to Powys's greatness as a novelist.

Powys gives us two definitions of the philosopher which set his conception apart from the academic. Philip Crow is no philosopher because he "did not articulate his feelings about life",<sup>19</sup> while the only kind of philosopher who must be taken seriously is the one who creates the dreams of the young.<sup>20</sup> Philosophy in the academic and technical sense is dangerous to poetry, but philosophy as literature is the best background a poet can have.<sup>21</sup> By "philosophy as literature" Powys means reconstructing what a philosopher's fundamental attitudes towards the universe are. Surface distractions and defences have to be penetrated to reach what Powys calls the philosopher's "secret". Powys's habit of reading philosophers as if there were a deeper message to be found beneath the surface meaning of the text is, to judge from his critical essays, the characteristic frame of mind in which he approached all literature. This was well described by Tolstoy: "When we read or look at the ar-

tistic production of a new author", Tolstoy remarked, "the fundamental question that arises in our soul is always of this kind: 'Well, what sort of man are you? Wherein are you different from all the people I know, and what can you tell me that is new about how we must look at this life of ours?'"<sup>22</sup>

Coleridge, like Powys, finds more in a philosopher than conventional academic interpretation ever suspects. In his treatment of Kant, Coleridge hints at a deeper and more dangerous meaning, not intended for those of us who cannot pierce "the symbolic husk" of Kant's writing.<sup>23</sup> Piercing "the symbolic husk" is, to use Coleridge's phrase, a good description of what Powys himself does when he reveals writers' "secrets"; and for that matter, characters in Powys's novels are adept in this line of penetration too.

Powys moves with an enviable ease of comprehension through the works of the great philosophers. His reading was intense<sup>24</sup> if not comprehensive. In the United States, Powys lectured on philosophers as well as on other writers.<sup>25</sup> Philosophy too lent herself to "dithyrambic analysis". Powys's interest in philosophy reveals itself then in his lecturing, his reading and of course in his writing. His most interesting use of philosophy, it seems to me, is not so much in his 'official' philosophy books, but in his novels, and not least, in his literary criticism.<sup>26</sup>

Powys often described himself as a philosopher,<sup>27</sup> and this is not purely a self-description. Thus Powys was awarded the Bronze Plaque of the Hamburg Free Academy of Arts for outstanding services to literature and *philosophy*.<sup>28</sup> But Powys's services to philosophy are unlikely to be widely recognized partly because of the professionalisation of philosophy which occurred during Powys's own life time.

One of the sources for Powys's philosophy is the pre-Socratic philosophers—Heraclitus, Empedocles, Democritus, Pythagoras.<sup>29</sup> Broadly speaking, the pre-Socratics were interested in cosmology, not morality and politics. It

was Socrates who made the problem of values central to philosophy. Indeed *Morwyn*, which is undervalued, may be approached in terms of a contrast between the wise naturalism of the pre-Socratics and the moral absolutism of Plato.<sup>30</sup>

Socrates makes a brief appearance in *A Glastonbury Romance*<sup>31</sup> but the allusion is a conventional one. In *Morwyn* we have something much more original. Socrates appears here as a memorably imagined dramatic character in his own right. This, and in particular the handling of the courtroom scene in hell make *Morwyn* deserving of our consideration. Socrates has fled to hell to avoid importunate successors in philosophy who would pester him with their pet theories. Amusing as this is, and it is a nice Powysian touch to have Socrates in flight from philosophical debate which he himself was so instrumental in promoting, it is certainly not sufficient to give *Morwyn* the importance I claim. Rather this rests upon Powys's diagnosis of what is wrong in modern thought and civilization, namely conscience is now divorced from intellect. In the history of this divorce Socrates is a pivotal and ambivalent figure. The gap between what we know and what we ought to do, a gap to which Powys gives dramatic expression in *Morwyn*, has been gone over time and again in modern academic philosophy, under such slogans as 'fact and value'. *Morwyn* attacks knowledge in the name of wisdom. It raises disturbing questions about the pursuit of truth as an ideal, whether religious or scientific truth is the truth that is sought.<sup>32</sup>

Powys confesses a "terrific debt" to Spinoza, though characteristically, he adds that the wisest thing in the world is a power possessed by women;<sup>33</sup> sometimes he enlarges to attribute deepest wisdom to old maids. Academic thinkers are facetious about old wives' tales, but for real wisdom that is where we must eventually go.<sup>34</sup> Spinoza is "tremendous" because his philosophy can help in the crises of life.<sup>35</sup> But as he recognized, he would not be widely understood. The majestic conclusion of the *Ethics* predicts as much.<sup>36</sup> Powys

shares Spinoza's passion for freedom, but not Spinoza's belief in scientific enquiry as the means for achieving it. For Powys, the means to freedom is not though intellect, but through imagination, about which Spinoza, typical of rationalist philosophers, is contemptuous. If Spinoza is writing for the few, Powys is writing for the many. In the spirit of James, he is something of a populist. Spinoza may have liberated a many-sided genius like Goethe<sup>37</sup> (or Matthew Arnold)<sup>38</sup> from the teasing duty to daily self-sacrifice, but only a few of us will be able to share in this liberation. Whether Powys himself is among these is something which, with characteristic tact and delicacy, is left unstated.<sup>39</sup> Certainly Powys seems undaunted by the complexity of Spinoza's thought, and shows a familiarity with it in several ways. First there is his statement of some idea of Spinoza's,<sup>40</sup> and more interesting, there is the daring way in which Powys plays with Spinoza's philosophy. Also to be remembered are resemblances between Powys's ideas and Spinoza's. Thus Powys bids us never to blame ourselves or others for what happens amiss.<sup>41</sup> He must surely have responded warmly therefore to such propositions of Spinoza's as "Repentance is not a virtue . . . but he who repents of an action is twice as unhappy or as weak as before"; and "There cannot be too much merriment, but it is always good; but, on the other hand, melancholy is always bad."<sup>42</sup>

Powys, or to be accurate, his characters,<sup>43</sup> quite often play extravagant games with the ideas of philosophers. They turn those ideas inside out and upside down. They penetrate the "symbolic husk" of a philosopher's text. Take for example Adrian Sorio's theories about Spinoza in *Rodmoor*.

Sorio is working on a philosophy of destruction (not by any means the only Powysian character who will do so). It seems peculiarly audacious of him to call in aid the philosopher Spinoza, one of whose more memorable propositions is "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life".<sup>44</sup> One might think of course, that

there is no formal inconsistency here, by arguing that Sorio is not a free man, and that this is part of the point of the novel. *His* meditation is of death, and this theme of Sorio's bondage would, I think, repay further exploration. Sorio holds that we are mistaken if we think Spinoza worshipped nature. On the contrary, Spinoza hated life and wished to destroy it. He wanted to annihilate nature and with his terrible logic he did so.<sup>45</sup>

My first response was to think that Powys was letting Sorio irresponsibly fool around with ideas that he, Powys, had securely understood, in order to see what philosophical nonsense he could generate, for the sheer jest of it. To be really nonsensical in philosophy implies a good philosophical mind, otherwise the result is not readable nonsense, but merely boring, which Sorio is not. There is something insidiously convincing about *his* Spinoza, notwithstanding one's better judgment. My second, and more considered response, was that Sorio is not merely fooling around with a philosophy which neither he, nor his creator Powys, understood. The clue that Powys may himself actually share *something* of Sorio's view of Spinoza comes when Powys speaks, in his own voice, of passages in Dostoevsky which are so beautiful and sinister that they make one think of certain Demonic sayings of Spinoza.<sup>46</sup> Like Spinoza, Powys opposes the dualistic separation of the human person into two distinct sorts of substance, mind and body, a dualism commonly associated with Descartes' philosophy, but which is widespread in European thought. Powys's opposition is practical not theoretical.<sup>47</sup> Powys is fascinated by the saying of "the Frenchman" that "other people are hell",<sup>48</sup> and he wants to see what escape there is. Philosophy can deliver us from this hell by locating the source of the trouble in the erroneous belief that other people are spiritual beings. What puts us into their power is the belief that people have secret souls within, which may scheme against us or have hostile thoughts towards us. But we must regard other people exactly as if they

were no more than they appeared to be, as if their bodies, their faces, their whole appearance were all there was of them.<sup>49</sup>

Powys turns this attack of his on dualism to excellent effect in his essay on Dickens.<sup>50</sup> Mystery lies on the surface. The surface of things is the heart of things. Psychologists peer and pry, while all the time, as Dickens so superbly demonstrates, the real essence of the figure that is you and I lies in its momentary expression. "People *think* with their bodies, and their looks and gestures; nay! their very garments are words, tones, whispers, in their general Confession."<sup>51</sup>

Kant is another metaphysical thinker to whom Powys acknowledges a terrific debt,<sup>52</sup> but his response to Kant is slightly less warm than his response to Spinoza, for though Kant is some help in a crisis in our lives, the help is less than we need.<sup>53</sup> Powys is wrong to say that for Kant time and space are only categories of thought. Rather they are the fundamental principles or conditions of perception.<sup>54</sup> But Powys gets the general drift of Kant's argument right, namely that from an ultimate point of view time and space are unreal. Kant's ideas about time and space seem to have been important in the development of Powys's thought. G. Wilson Knight explains how in his later work, Powys became absorbed in the notion of space, that he thought it much more important than time, and that Kant was wrong to make time and space co-equal.<sup>55</sup> But if Kant was wrong, he provided Powys with the initial impetus, I suspect, for doubting the ultimate reality of space and time, and thus must have been a liberating force in Powys's intellectual development. Powys is much less impressed by the Categorical Imperative. On the question of what is right and good we should not call the Categorical Imperative in aid from outside the universe.<sup>56</sup>

When it comes to philosophy, Powys is much more interested in metaphysics than he is in ethics. His own ethic is a sane and non-speculative hatred of cruelty, though he can go more deeply than the simple decency.<sup>57</sup> Still relevant for our

contemporary moral philosophy is Powys's exposition of Pater. We may test every experience life can offer short of those which make life more bitter for the other person. If we want to know why we should consider the other person, Powys replies, for no *reason*, and under no threat or categorical imperative; simply man has become the sort of animal who cannot do what he would. It is not a question of conscience but a matter of taste.<sup>58</sup> Powys's recognition that morality has what might be called an aesthetic basis is, in my view, needed to redress the aridity of much modern moral philosophy;<sup>59</sup> it does greater justice to the facts of morality than any rationalistic system like Kant's, or any scientific, reductionist ethics like utilitarianism.

Powys's borrowing from Kant was, as we should expect, selective. There are passages in Kant, which are in fundamental opposition to Powys's deepest attitudes. Take Kant's attack on enjoyment. Powys's philosophy may be summarized in the command "solely to enjoy".<sup>60</sup> Kant, who held that enjoyment could never constitute a rational morality,<sup>61</sup> grows savage on the subject of enjoyment:

But that there is any intrinsic worth in the real existence of a man who merely lives for enjoyment, however busy he may be in this respect, even when in so doing he serves others—all equally with himself intent only on enjoyment—and as an excellent means to that one end, and does so, moreover, because through sympathy he shares all their gratifications—this is a view to which reason will never let itself be brought round.<sup>62</sup>

One could not find a more uncompromising opposition to Powys's "Pantagrueian" philosophy. But Powys is not a man to be bullied by tyrant words like "reason". He declares himself "a sworn irrationalist",<sup>63</sup> and this brings us to the heart of the quarrel between Powys and academic philosophers. There are perhaps three species of reason, and correspondingly of philosophy: scepticism (Hume); dogmatism (Plato, Spinoza) and criticism (Kant). However much these different

species of philosophers disagree with one another, they share a common enemy, irrationalism (Nietzsche, Bergson, Powys).

Powys's attitudes towards Spinoza and Kant seem fairly settled. His attitude to Hegel is more mercurial. Hegel's system would not hold us back from suicide,<sup>64</sup> but Powys got more pleasure from it than from Kant's, since what he demanded in metaphysics was the real and the concrete. Powys must have thought well of Hegel to have found William James a startling delight, "for all his roguish jibes at Hegel".<sup>65</sup> But this does not stop him from putting into Adrian Sorio's mouth expressions of contempt for Hegel, "the grocer of philosophy";<sup>66</sup> and during the second world war Powys made the then—commonplace charge of identifying Hegel with Nazi totalitarianism.<sup>67</sup>

Powys declares "a temperamental intuitive preference for the Many over the One",<sup>68</sup> which puts his own philosophical position poles apart from Hegel's.

There is little doubt that Powys reserved his deepest admiration for William James. James, like Powys, fervently believed in what one might call the open future. We do *not* know what tomorrow will bring and this fact has implications for the preciousness of the present moment.

The evidence that William James and John Cowper Powys were kindred spirits is extensive.<sup>69</sup> Both loved lecturing and conversation; they were men of protean identity; they shared a passion for freedom, a love of Walt Whitman's poetry, a coolness towards logic, mathematics and rationalist philosophy. They were both sceptical towards deeply entrenched philosophical positions such as dualism; they were committed to pluralism in philosophy, and above all, both men possessed a rare openness of mind and appetite for experience. Like Powys, James was interested in what made life meaningful to people, and in what should keep us from suicide. There cannot be many academic philosophers who have written or spoken, as James did, under titles like "Is life worth living?" William James then addressed himself to people, not

especially to professional philosophers, and he listened to them to find out what life meant to them.<sup>70</sup> Powys responded to James's irrationalism.<sup>71</sup> One of our leading academic philosophers has suggested that James was led into a form of irrationalism which owed much to Bergson, because intellectualism was suspect to him as being Hegelian.<sup>72</sup> Ayer's description of James as temperamentally a man who took large views would be a good way of describing Powys.

James gets an honourable mention in *Morwyn*;<sup>73</sup> Powys follows James in keeping an open mind towards the occult;<sup>74</sup> and, not alone among philosophers, Powys is struck by Jamesian terminology, which he appropriates for his own purposes.<sup>75</sup> However there is no need to hunt around in Powys's writings for peripheral references to James, when it is quite plain that what appeals to Powys is James's pluralism.<sup>76</sup> Powys's 'pantagruelism' is a rough-and-ready anticipation of that bold, polytheistic pluralism of James, in which James attacks the block-universe of the orthodox metaphysician, and finds the reality of things in the Many rather than in the One.<sup>77</sup> Pluralism, Powys says, has a claim to be regarded as the American philosophy *par excellence*.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps Powys's enthusiasm gets the better of him when Homer<sup>79</sup> and Keats<sup>80</sup> are enrolled as pluralists. Whitman's appearance here is less surprising.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, "when we consider Walt as well as the two James . . . true wisdom cometh rather from the setting than the rising sun".<sup>82</sup>

Nobody can read far into Powys before coming across mention of our "life-illusion". This arresting phrase, which Powys got, I think, from Ibsen, signifies the central idea which a human being must have of himself, if his life is to have meaning. This idea also interested William James.<sup>83</sup> Our true selves, James said, are those on which we have staked our salvation. If I have staked my all on being a psychologist, I am mortified if others know more psychology than I do, but when it

comes to Greek, I am content to wallow in ignorance.<sup>84</sup>

The issue of academic philosophy versus philosophy of life is easily raised when we consider William James. James is read with respect by academic philosophers, but he is not in the main stream of academic orthodoxy and doubts have been raised.<sup>85</sup> Thus Margaret Knight, a psychologist, puts James the philosopher in a lower class than James the psychologist. And if this judgment coming from a psychologist strikes us as specialist pleading, we have the view of the philosopher Santayana that the *Principles of Psychology* was James's best achievement.<sup>86</sup> Margaret Knight went on to say "James the philosopher was at best little more than a brilliant and slightly irresponsible amateur".<sup>87</sup> This judgment is based on too narrow a view of philosophy—but what should interest us is that such a judgment about James could have been made at all. No-one, for example, could think of Kant or Spinoza as amateurs. What is interesting therefore is that the philosopher to whom Powys should have been most deeply drawn is the one whose own professional reputation is the least secure.

James *can* be charged with amateurishness in philosophy, because of his dislike of logic, a dislike Powys shares.<sup>88</sup> Formal logic is of central importance to academic philosophy in our age, and is one of the reasons why philosophy is inaccessible to the general reader, whereas the non-technical James and Powys may both keep alive the sense of "philosophy", in which we expect it to deal with ultimate questions. The mathematization of philosophy directs it away from these issues.

Bertrand Russell played an important part in making formal logic central to philosophy, though he retained a passionate interest in philosophical issues in the wider and colloquial sense. It is of considerable interest therefore that John Cowper Powys and Bertrand Russell should have met together in public debate. One would expect their debate on "Is Modern

Marriage a Failure?" to throw some light on the issue of amateur and professional conceptions of philosophy, and one is not disappointed.

In the debate, Powys plainly thinks of himself as one philosopher disputing with another,<sup>89</sup> though the way in which he distances himself from Russell turns precisely upon the question of the extent to which philosophy should be mathematical. Russell is the mathematician and the rationalist, Powys the irrationalist, who thinks that certain mysterious instincts in life must occasionally have play.<sup>90</sup> Powys criticises Russell for ignoring the mystic aspects of marriage. We do not know enough at present to be sure that mysterious forces, magical powers, do not come from outside the universe.<sup>91</sup>

Not everything can be said about Powys and philosophy by charting Powys's response to particular philosophers, important though that is, particularly in the case of James.<sup>92</sup> Thus we have to mention, though we cannot do justice to Powys's theories of science, art and politics.

Concerning science, Powys sometimes gives the impression of identifying science with vivisection, of confusing part with whole.<sup>93</sup> There is little point in arguing that Powys was not hostile to science. Yet although this is broadly true, as usual the truth is more complex. I suggest that Powys is attacking three postulates that underlie scientific inquiry: first, that the pursuit of scientific knowledge is good in itself; secondly, that science itself is neither good nor bad; and thirdly, that we ought rationally to discuss all questions with minds that are open and tolerant. We might add a rider here, that according to the scientific or liberal ideal of thought, all questions are rationally discussible. Regarding the first point, Powys thinks that the pursuit of science and truth are mad ideals.<sup>94</sup> Powys's second charge is that science cares nothing for the distinction between right and wrong.<sup>95</sup>

The third postulate—the principle of tolerance—is the one most worth noting, since Powys himself usually subscribes to it.

After all, there has never been a more tolerant philosopher than William James, and as Powys himself held about art "there must be a certain spirit of liberation, and the presence of large tolerant after-thoughts".<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, Powys does set limits to the questions which *are* open to free debate, and he is right to do so. The view that not every moral issue is open to discussion, for in setting limits to what is freely discussible, it is moral issues with which we are primarily concerned here, is correct, for two main reasons. First, it follows from Powys's aesthetic conception of morality which I discussed earlier, that not every moral judgment is open to review. If, as Powys says, there are some things which we cannot do, being the animals we are, then there is little point in discussing whether we ought to do them.

Secondly, if we believe that all questions of right and wrong, good and evil are open to *genuine* debate, it follows that we do not *know* whether something is wrong until we have dispassionately addressed our minds to the question. But if we do not know, it follows that that something—torture, cruelty, vivisection, genocide,—might in the light of the debate turn out to be right. But Powys is not prepared to allow this debate, for to hold debates on the ethics of such things is itself morally monstrous:

My knowledge that the practice of vivisection, for example, is a crime against everything that is noblest in our race, is not a conviction, *it is my life* . . . And I would say the same when people ask me for proof that these miserable dogs suffer. 'With my whole being I know,' I answer them, 'that the vivisection of dogs is evil!'<sup>97</sup>

We may disagree about what we know to be evil, and this is undoubtedly a problem in Powys's position; but not to allow for this sort of knowledge leads to a trivialisation of morality, and justifies the impatience we find Powys expressing for "ethical discussion".

We cannot leave it then that Powys simply hated science. Besides the complications I have explained, we should not forget that knowledge of natural history

belongs to science, and that Powys's command of this seems to have been extensive.<sup>98</sup>

Powys describes himself as a born reactionary,<sup>99</sup> but in fact his political opinions were left wing and progressive.<sup>100</sup> Certainly Marxists would see him as a reactionary, for Powys is supremely interested in the diversity of individual people, and he does not have much sense of human beings working together for the sake of political reform or revolutionary change.<sup>101</sup> Powys is concerned to help the individual live his life in spite of the mad society in which he finds himself, and does not believe that political change leading to a saner society, important though that is, will solve all the ills which man on this planet is heir to.<sup>102</sup>

In political philosophy Powys is a philosophical anarchist.<sup>103</sup> In the person of Paul Trent (*A Glastonbury Romance*) but primarily in his own letters, Powys shows an intelligent awareness of anarchist literature, and a personal commitment to philosophical anarchism. Like all philosophical anarchists, he has first to dispose of the vulgar error which confuses anarchy with violence and bomb throwing.<sup>104</sup>

Powys's master passion is freedom. The word used here refers to the capacity every human being has to enjoy his life, in spite of his circumstances, probably hard and never to be utopianly eased. A major means to liberation is through the imagination which, Powys says, the most ordinary person possesses in the most extraordinary and unrecognized degree. Certainly, as Jeremy Hooker has well said, Powys's power of imagination is "a great liberation for those trapped within a narrow conception of their human potentiality".<sup>105</sup> There is no dishonest pretence that life is not burdensome—Powys detested Browning's optimism. The problem Powys has as a philosopher, is to think and imagine how the burden may be made to feel lighter. Human beings must be free. Freedom is far more important for any healthy and natural enjoyment of life than love. About love, Powys, in spite of his

capacity to portray it in his novels, is sceptical and critical.

It is no use pretending that Powys took much interest in philosophical aesthetics, any more than he did in ethics. Nevertheless, Powys has some illuminating things to say.

Powys appears to hold an instrumental view of art, a view that is, which values art for the effects it has on the reader or spectator. This is not a popular position in academic circles, since it has the consequence that the value of a work of art is relative to the needs of the individual reader. If different people's responses to the same work vary, the value of that work becomes not something fixed and absolute, but fluctuating in character. Philosophers find this an intolerable conclusion. Moreover, if art is to be valued for its effects, since it is conceivable that these effects might have been achieved otherwise than by means of art, then art becomes, in principle, dispensable and redundant. Then there is no peculiar uniqueness about the value of art, and art comes to seem devalued. I doubt if Powys would have been deterred by this line of objection. He was not one to be intimidated by threat of the loss of fixities and absolutes, nor one to look for unique values. That sort of thing belongs to the rationalist line of thought. Nevertheless, I have to be tentative in suggesting that Powys was an instrumentalist. I think he was, for example, when he wrote in his *Autobiography*,

To the devil with "art"! I am too old a fox in the "Park Coverts" of the Cosmos to be led by the nose by any braggadocio of that kind. My writings—novels and all—are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life.<sup>106</sup>

Powys's judgment of Shelley applies well to himself. What separates Shelley from other poets, he says, is that with them "art" is the paramount concern, and after art, morality; whereas in the case of Shelley one thinks little of art.<sup>107</sup>

Many academic accounts of the "aesthetic attitude", what is appropriate to our response to art as art, go on to identify

the aesthetic with an enjoyment of sensory qualities for their own sake. This comes under strain however, if we try to explain the aesthetic character of literature. Powys avoids this trap. With authors like Dostoevsky, "it is not any more a case of enjoying with distant aesthetic amusement the general human spectacle. (The reader) is the one scratched and pricked".<sup>108</sup> Philosophical aesthetics often overlooks this aspect of art and leaves the impression that the philosopher of art is too thick-skinned to be scratched by anything.

There are passages in *A Glastonbury Romance* which challenge an orthodoxy of academic aesthetics. John Crow finds the talk of the poet, Edward Athling, about art distasteful, for his instincts were profoundly anti-aesthetic. When Crow enjoyed anything it was by direct contact as if the thing were a physical sensation. The principles, laws, rules, methods and above all the *opinions* that led up to this especial thing seemed to him nothing but exhausting and tedious pedantry, devoid of all value.<sup>109</sup> But this should not be taken at its face value; for to explain the sense in which Crow's instincts *are* anti-aesthetic is to take us into a tangle of still unresolved questions. The complexity of the issue is confirmed when we notice that Crow's 'anti-aesthetic' instincts correspond to sentiments expressed in the letters of that great poet of beauty John Keats, in whom Powys had taken an especial interest.

The idea of literature as art is commonplace nowadays. A conversation between Ned Athling and Lady Rachel Zoyland offers a striking challenge to this orthodoxy. Rachel rebukes Ned for holding that poetry is an art. Don't use that word, she tells him. If you had heard the talk, the affection, the boredom that surrounds the use of it, she goes on,—poetry is not an art. It is poetry, something entirely different. Ned must rid himself of this horrible modern idea that poetry is an art.<sup>110</sup> The smart chatter of London literary circles, which so annoyed Rachel Zoyland, has transferred itself to the dull deliberations of the seminar room; for when the question,

what is art, is mooted by philosophers, poetry, painting, music, architecture and so on, are all promiscuously thrown together under the generic term "art".

I have tended to stress the differences between Powys and professional philosophers. I might end however with two instances, randomly chosen, in which Powys displays the sort of thinking which is typical of good academic philosophy.

We have seen that (like many professional philosophers) Powys is opposed to the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. An influential work against dualism has been Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*. We might compare Powys and Ryle on the topic of pretending. First Powys: "When an infant goes puffing down the path with one hand clenched and the other holding a stick and repeating the syllables "chew-chew" over and over, it doesn't say to itself "I am pretending to be a train!" It really feels in a very peculiar and special way that it is a train".<sup>111</sup> Now Ryle: "Talking about a person pretending to be a bear or a corpse involves talking obliquely about how bears and corpses behave, or are supposed to behave".<sup>112</sup> Pretending the stick is a train is, on Ryle's view, seeing the stick as a train; it is not having in the mind's eye a picture of a train, to which the stick feebly corresponds. Powys's point is underlined by Ernst Gombrich: "In the world of the child there is no clear distinction between reality and appearance. He can use the most unlikely tools for the most unlikely purposes—a table upside down for a spaceship, a basin for a crash helmet. For the context of the game it will serve its purpose rather well. The basin does not 'represent' a crash helmet, it *is* a kind of improvised helmet".<sup>113</sup>

The second example is this. Whoever *began* a dream, Powys asks. People always find themselves immersed in the *middle* of some dream or other. This acute observation could worthily come from the work of some academic philosopher, concerned to distinguish dreams from reality: for 'dreaming' has been a philosophical problem, at least since Descartes. But the

way in which Powys completes his thought reminds us, if absurdly such a reminder were needed, that Powys is no philosopher within the grooves of Academe. The essence of sleep, he goes on, does not lie in

dreaming; it lies in a certain dying to the surface life and sinking down into the life under the surface, where the other life exists like an immortal taste of fresh water.<sup>14</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am thinking of books like *The Art of Happiness* (1923), Village Press 1974; *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant* (1928) Village Press 1974; *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930); *The Art of Growing Old* (1944); *In Spite of. A Philosophy for Everyman*, (1953).

<sup>2</sup> G. Wilson Knight indicates the complexity in his study, *The Saturnian Quest*, 1964. See for example his discussion of *Maiden Castle*.

<sup>3</sup> G. Vesey, ed., *Philosophy in the Open*, Open University Press, 1974, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> See for example *In Spite Of*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Autobiography*, 1934, p. 488.

<sup>6</sup> *Visions and Revisions*, 1955, "Dostoievsky", p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, Oxford, 1973, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Powys himself pokes gentle fun at the young people who would ask him what Pater's 'viewpoint'—"so they are pleased to express it"—was. *Visions and Revisions*, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Cavaliero, p. 155. Littleton Powys thought that John Cowper would be remembered for his philosophical books too. *The Powys Family*, rev. 1952, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> "The great Kant himself found that the secret of things lies in the inspiration of the human conscience rather than in the cunning decrees of the human intellect." *The Pleasures of Literature*, 1938, 1946, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Thus Santayana, described by Powys as a dogmatic cultural guide in our age of cultural disintegration (see *The Meaning of Culture*), and colleague of William James at Harvard, partly characterized James's philosophical teaching as sermons for the young Christian soldier. (G. Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States*, New York, 1920, p. 84.) James fell in, Santayana reports, with the hortatory tradition of college sages, turning his psychology where he could do so honestly to purposes of edification. There is also a fleeting reference to Santayana in Powys's *Autobiography*, p. 568.

<sup>12</sup> In the "professional" literature I have only come across one reference to Powys, and this is a fringe case. E. Wilkinson and L. Willoughby in their magnificent edition of Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Oxford, 1967, mention Powys's *Homer and the Aether* in their commentary, p. 239. C.E.M. Joad, a famous professional

philosopher in his day reviewed *The Art of Happiness* in *The Spectator* (see Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys. A Record of Achievement*, 1966, p. 137).

<sup>13</sup> Professional philosophers, Powys says, are not a patch upon the great soothsayers, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Goethe, Rabelais, Nietzsche. *Letters 1937-54 to Iorwerth Peate*, University of Wales, 1974, p. 83. And there is an exasperated aside in the essay on Pater, *Visions and Revisions*, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup> *Weymouth Sands*, 1963. Gaul is a delicious case of fiction anticipating fact. Gaul's method of philosophy is so flexible as scarcely to be a method. A recent publication by a philosopher of *science* (no less) is entitled *Against Method* (Paul Feyerabend, New Left Books, 1975). The title is not the only things Powys/Gaul would have enjoyed. To complete the Powysian irony, there is the subtitle—"Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge" and a fascinating discussion of Homer.

<sup>15</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, 1933, p. 597.

<sup>16</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals, Philosophy of Nietzsche*, New York: Random House, Modern Library n.d. pp. 106-107.

<sup>17</sup> *Genealogy*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Genealogy*, p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 695.

<sup>20</sup> In this case the poet Shelley. *Visions and Revisions* p. 132. One cannot think of anything the average professor of philosophy would be less willing or less able to do than create dreams for his students.

<sup>21</sup> *The Pleasures of Literature*, 1938, 1946, p. 409.

<sup>22</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* Oxford, World's Classics, 1930, "Introduction to the Works of Guy de Maupassant", p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. IX, Dent, Everyman, 1906, esp. pp. 76-77.

<sup>24</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 478.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Hegel, Spinoza, Schopenhauer. *Autobiography*, p. 518.

<sup>26</sup> Many of my own references are to Powys's literary criticism. Powys often used philosophy to yield some insight into a writer.

<sup>27</sup> For example in the *Autobiography* but not only there.

<sup>28</sup> Langridge, p. 201.

<sup>29</sup> *In Spite Of*, p. 309; *In Defence of Sensuality*. I shall now examine Powys's response to philosophers

in the western tradition, though as he reminds us he is philosophically indebted to the East as well.

<sup>30</sup> I do not try to distinguish here between Socrates and Plato, but Powys himself did not know Plato at all well (Langridge, p. 180).

<sup>31</sup> Sam Dekker was "standing in that fixed position and in that same abstracted trance into which it is recorded that the philosophic Socrates fell at certain crises in his life" (p. 301).

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche's view of religions as systems of cruelty, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 45, and his observation that considered physiologically, science rests on that same ascetic basis as does philosophy, which is the enemy of art (*Genealogy*, p. 167), are of considerable interest in relation to *Morwyn*.

<sup>33</sup> *In Spite Of*, pp. 272-274.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67, p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Dent, Everyman, 1910, p. 224.

<sup>37</sup> *In Spite Of*, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> *The Pleasures of Literature*, pp. 423-424.

<sup>39</sup> Professor Motwani thought Powys's philosophy was as profound as Spinoza's, and as kindly as Christ's (Langridge, p. 57).

<sup>40</sup> "When Spinoza taught that the will of God was limited by the nature of God he was not deducing such doctrines from his intimate experience but from his mathematical reason". *A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 1051. Casual remarks like this show an exceptional ability to summarize succinctly difficult philosophical theories. We should not be deceived by the idea of Powys—fostered by himself and others—as a wordy windbag. He can be terse when it pleases him. We may not notice the fierce intelligence of his insights, or the economically spare form in which they are expressed, because they are thrown off apparently as random asides, with grace and good manners. We can easily believe what was said of Powys as a lecturer, that he never patronized his audiences. On the contrary, the idea that the reader may not know or understand how, according to Spinoza, God's will relates to God's nature, does not cross Powys's mind.

<sup>41</sup> Preface to the Japanese edition of *The Meaning of Culture*; see Langridge, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book 4, Prop. LIX, p. 178; Prop. XLII, p. 171.

<sup>43</sup> One should not too readily suppose that Powys's characters are Powys, though more than one critic seems to have supposed something like this—see R.C. Churchill, *The Powys Brothers, Writers and their Work*, No. 150, 1962, pp. 15-16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ethics*, Book 4, Prop. LXVII, p. 187.

<sup>45</sup> *Rodmoor*, 1973, pp. 325-26.

<sup>46</sup> *Visions and Revisions*, p. 189.

<sup>47</sup> So giving us a demonstration of the claim I made earlier. Powys is not interested in the *arguments* for or against Cartesian dualism, but in putting right the havoc this doctrine wreaks on human life.

<sup>48</sup> J. P. Sartre, *Huis Clos*, "L'enfer, c'est les autres".

<sup>49</sup> *In Spite Of*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>50</sup> Another good instance of the way in which philosophical ideas lie at the very heart of Powys's literary criticism.

<sup>51</sup> *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>52</sup> *In Spite Of*, p. 272.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. Kant distinguishes between principles of perception (time and space) and categories of thought. Categories of thought are concepts like causality or substance, by means of which material, which is given to us in sense perception, is cognitively organised or understood.

<sup>55</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*.

<sup>56</sup> *Letters to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*, 1958, p. 189.

<sup>57</sup> Casual remarks such as that justice is one of the very rarest of human virtues (*Letters to Louis Wilkinson*, p. 213) suggest a capacity for moral philosophy.

<sup>58</sup> *Visions and Revisions*, pp. 175-76.

<sup>59</sup> See my "Morality and Literary Criticism", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Summer, 1975.

<sup>60</sup> *In Spite Of*, p. 22. The command is restricted; cruelty is forbidden.

<sup>61</sup> H. Paton, *The Moral Law*, 1961, p. 90.

<sup>62</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, trans. J. Meredith, Oxford, 1911, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> *The Pleasures of Literature*, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> *In Spite Of*, p. 67.

<sup>65</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 479.

<sup>66</sup> *Rodmoor*, pp. 325-326.

<sup>67</sup> *The Art of Growing Old*.

<sup>68</sup> *Letters 1937-54 to Iorwerth Peate*, University of Wales, 1974, p. 54.

<sup>69</sup> There is room for a detailed study comparing James and Powys, a study which would include an account of the remarkable family life in childhood of both men.

<sup>70</sup> W. Earle, "William James", *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards, New York, 1967, esp. p. 241.

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. *The Pleasures of Literature*, p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Origins of Pragmatism*, 1968, pp. 185-189.

<sup>73</sup> *Morwyn*, p. 264.

<sup>74</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 561.

<sup>75</sup> "The mere idea of the scholastic theologians has 'thickened out' as James would say, the possibilities of life for me." *Autobiography*, pp. 630-631.

<sup>76</sup> In works written across a period of more than twenty years—from the *Autobiography* to *In Spite Of*—but reflecting a much longer stretch of Powys's life, admiration for James's pluralism is consistently expressed. From the standpoint of Indian philosophy, Powys may be, as Motwani asserts, a qualified monist. (Langridge, p. 216). From his own standpoint he avowedly was not. "To be a Pluralist rather than a Monist, is as much an instinct with me as it is to every East Indian to be obsessed by Unity"

(*Autobiography*, p. 55). Reference to pluralism may be found also in the *Autobiography*, p. 424; *In Spite Of*, p. 309; *Letters to Peate*, p. 54; *The Inmates*, 1952, Preface, p. viii.

<sup>77</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Rabelais*, 1948, p. 370.

<sup>78</sup> *The Art of Growing Old*, pp. 152-153. This is interesting. Pragmatism, not pluralism, is usually awarded this accolade.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Visions and Revisions*, p. 139. Keats's letters are polytheistic, paganist, pluralist.

<sup>81</sup> *The Art of Growing Old*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>82</sup> L. Wilkinson, *Welsh Ambassadors*, 1936, p. 147. This is high praise from a man who acknowledged a debt to the philosophy of the east—to Taoism for example (*In Spite Of*, p. 309).

<sup>83</sup> And other American philosophers like Josiah Royce, absolute idealist, friend and philosophical enemy of William James, and sometime tutor to T.S. Eliot. American academic philosophy has responded far more creatively than has British philosophy to the problems of self identity. In this respect Powys belongs in the company of the philosophers of the country where he himself made such a mark.

<sup>84</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Holt, 1890; Dover paperback reprint), vol. 1, pp. 310-313.

<sup>85</sup> Though James is far from without academic defenders particularly in America. A British defence by A.J. Ayer has already been cited. On the whole academic philosophy has been harsh on James's pragmatism. In this instance we find Powys joining forces with the academics. He thought pragmatism contemptible. See *In Defence of Sensuality*. There maybe much that is wrong technically with James's pragmatism—this is why the academics attack it; but Powys's disavowal notwithstanding, it seems to me that the spirit of Powys's own philosophy is pragmatic.

<sup>86</sup> G. Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, p. 67.

<sup>87</sup> M. Knight, *William James*, Penguin, 1950, p. 50.

<sup>88</sup> 'Logic' is here used in the technical sense to mean formal logic which is mathematical in character. No suggestion is being made that James (or Powys) was weak in the head and lacked the ability to reason. Margaret Knight, p. 50, uses the fact of James's dislike of logic against him. But Ayer, *The Origins of Pragmatism*, p. 186, thinks that James's tendency to look askance at logic is easier to understand when we remember that the logic of his day was Hegelian.

<sup>89</sup> For example, "for children are much wiser than many of us philosophers". Langridge, p. 65.

<sup>90</sup> "My opponent" (says Powys) "is a great philosopher and above all a mathematician. It is therefore only too natural for him to lay stress upon the legal, biological, scientific and scholastic aspects of the problem (namely whether modern marriage is a failure). There are however in nature, in life, as Shakespeare points out at least once in his work,

there are occasions when certain mysterious instincts have play". Langridge, pp. 65-66.

<sup>91</sup> Langridge, p. 66. Powys gives Russell the larger field, but I think with tongue in cheek, implying that Russell is welcome to it: "both Mr. Russell in his larger field, and myself in my own peripatetic existence are struggling after what he has so nobly called the good life". Langridge, p. 70.

<sup>92</sup> It is a pity to leave the subject of Powys and William James without at least noting Powys's volatile attitude to William James's brother, Henry. Although Powys's opinion of Henry James is not relevant to a study of Powys and philosophy, I think that it would be important in a comprehensive study of Powys. Thus while Powys's admiration for William James remains pretty constant, his attitude to Henry is remarkable for its mercurial changes. Why are there these changes?

Henry James is a source of true wisdom (*Welsh Ambassadors*, p. 147); Powys regrets not having heard of him whilst an undergraduate at Cambridge (Bernard Jones, "Style and the Man", *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. B. Humfrey, University of Wales, 1972, p. 164); his admiration both for William and Henry stops only just this side of idolatry (*Letters to Nicholas Ross*, 1971, p. 28); Yet "oh! how I hate Henry", *Letters to Ross*, p. 132); Powys says that he never took to Henry but used to get a lot from William (*Letters to Glyn Hughes*, 1971, p. 12); and contrary to all this "I think very highly and ever have of W. James. I like him as a philosopher *nearly as much* (my italics) as I like Henry James as a novelist" (*Letters to L. Wilkinson*, p. 81).

<sup>93</sup> I shall not document Powys's attack on vivisection here. His polemic will be well known to his readers. *Weymouth Sands*, *Morwyn* and *The Inmates* are prominent examples of Powys's books, but far from being the only ones, where vivisection is denounced.

<sup>94</sup> See *In Defence of Sensuality; Autobiography*, p. 360: "the most vain and treacherous of all pursuits was the pursuit of truth. Socrates is right. What we need is more wisdom. We have got enough knowledge".

<sup>95</sup> *The Pleasures of Literature*, p. 197.

<sup>96</sup> Preface to *Wood and Stone*, quoted by Cavaliero in Humfrey, *Essays*, p. 101.

<sup>97</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>98</sup> See not only the fictional picture of those great naturalists, Matthew and Sam Dekker in *A Glastonbury Romance*; but recall the deep knowledge of nature the Revd. C. Powys shared with his son. Somewhere Powys is scornful about those who would worship the beauties of nature while being ignorant of her workings. This is scarcely an against-science attitude.

<sup>99</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 274.

<sup>100</sup> Against class privilege; hated fascism in Spain and Portugal; applauded the entry into office of the 1945 Labour government.

<sup>101</sup> Notwithstanding the "political side" of *A Glastonbury Romance*—though critics generally agree in finding this weak. What Marxists would dislike about Powys is well brought out by R.C. Churchill when he says that Powys's concern with ultimate problems would seem bourgeois to them (*The Powys Brothers*, p. 31).

<sup>102</sup> Powys's essay on Thomas Hardy in *Visions and Revisions* is particularly good on this point (pp. 166-167).

<sup>103</sup> This provides the real ground for Marxist opposition to him. It is gratifying to find Powys's anarchist claims are taken seriously (if dealt with only briefly) in a standard work on Anarchism. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, Penguin, 1975, p. 428.

<sup>104</sup> See the conversation between Paul Trent and Red Robinson (*A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 749).

Powys's interest in anarchy seems to have gone back to his early days as an extension lecturer in

England: see the syllabus of the lecture on Ruskin (Langridge p. 38). Years later, Powys says that in *Mortal Strife* he advocates a Pluralistic, Anarchistical, Neo-Kantianism (*Letters to L. Wilkinson*, p. 88). Powys cites anarchist literature and blames governments—so much more wicked than private people—as the chief causes of war (*Letters to I. Peate*, p. 36).

<sup>105</sup> *Essays*, ed. B. Humfrey, p. 52. The Jamesian affinity is evident.

<sup>106</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 641.

<sup>107</sup> *Visions and Revisions*, p. 136.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>109</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 338.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

<sup>111</sup> *In Spite Of*, p. 132.

<sup>112</sup> G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 1949, p. 259.

<sup>113</sup> E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 1962, p. 84.

<sup>114</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, pp. 787-788.

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# Timothy Hyman

## The Religion of a Sceptic

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I think it is possible to see all John Cowper Powys's writing as centred on religious experience; but having said this, can we go any way towards defining or naming this religion? For example, is Powys best seen within a Christian perspective, as one who, like Blake, approaches heresy, but who offers nevertheless some original insights which actually advance Christian tradition? Or should we view his work as pointing away from Christianity altogether, reviving pre-Christian traditions and contributing to a syncretic religion of the future? Or is all discussion of tradition and dogma irrelevant, and is Powys's "religion" based only on the individual's momentary experience?

A strong case could be made out for each of these views, and when I come to examine *A Glastonbury Romance* it will I think be seen just how ambiguous Powys's position becomes as soon as one tries to bring it into relation with Christianity or with any other religious system. So I want to begin by setting aside these problems of placing for the time being, and, with the help of two witnesses, to approach Powys not as a writer of fiction, or as a religious philosopher, but as a persona. It is well-known that between the ages of thirty and sixty Powys's main activity was as a popular lecturer, and only when he retired from the platform in the late 1920s did his major fictional works begin to be written. But this lecturing was of a very particular kind; Powys's real achievement seems to have been to project a kind of dramatic character, an extravagant figure whose whole presence carried prophetic intimations of social, political, religious, and sexual liberation. This fully developed public persona has im-



portant consequences when Powys turns to fiction.

In one sense, every artist has a persona, but in Powys's writing this projection is unusually strong, and, although lightly and ironically worn, it has consciously prophetic overtones. Since the Romantic period, and since the breakdown of orthodox religious tradition, artists of all kinds have often been given the role of culture-hero. I think this is what Sartre meant by his study of "Saint" Genet, the artist who stands to his audience as saint to his devotees, or guru to his disciples, a second self who mediates a particular path or way. So the question I want to explore here is, partly, what is Powys's position in regard to other

religions; but also, what did Powys himself mediate when he was a lecturer, and how did he incorporate this persona within his fiction?

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Our first witness will be Louis Wilkinson, the lifelong friend of Powys, in his autobiographical novel, *The Buffoon*, of 1916.

In the novel's central relationship, Edward Raynes, a bachelor of impenetrable *sang-froid*, is drawn into the world of a flamboyant lecturer of grotesque personality, "Jack Welsh", who we at first assume to be the "buffoon" of the title. Yet Edward's poise has already been revealed to us as a mask, concealing one who is in fact

. . . subject to that mastery in chief of certain eighteenth-century minds, that mastery of fear of the personal indignities which invade us always, along with the intense sensations that come of going far whether in thought or in emotion.<sup>1</sup>

In Welsh, on the other hand, this fear of indignity, this holding back from thought or emotion, is entirely absent. Whether lecturing on "Art and Democracy", or moving in avant-garde literary London alongside Ezra Pound, or making love to shop-girls in Liverpool, Welsh, in his disinterested and spontaneous display of feeling, takes on something of the character of a Holy Fool, the alter-ego to Edward, shaming him and crystallising his self-distaste. Near the end of the book, Edward visits Welsh, who lies in hospital awaiting an operation for ulcers:

To Edward he had a look of nobility then, a look that was grave and fine. He could have been a genius, was a genius, perhaps . . . But for all that, Welsh was not a buffoon, except to the outer view . . . He looked at him once more, and then left without further word. He felt very small.<sup>2</sup>

The news the following day of Welsh's death, combined with Edward's being jilted in a narcissistic courtship, reveals to him that it is he, in his fear of indignity who is after all the true "buffoon". It is also the morning of the outbreak of the First War, and so the novel ends with the prospect of a

world-change which cannot fail to impinge on Edward.

So for Wilkinson in 1916, the values conveyed by Powys's early persona as a lecturer were connected with vulnerability, self-exposure, self-abandonment. To transfer such qualities to the written page would however present many difficulties, as is obvious from the account of one such lecture included in *The Buffoon* where Edward for the first time watches Welsh perform:

He noticed that Welsh was subject to extraordinary lapses, lapses that became more and more flagrant as he established his hold over his people. First he hypnotised them by incantations of some genuine power, then he would reel off clap-trap, launch joyously into bombast, strike out shamelessly for naked melodrama. Suddenly all this would fall away, and he would say something that really interested him, phrasing it with such audacity and giving it such an edge that his hearers started as though the edge had cut their flesh.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that these "lapses", these embarrassing falls from dignity, were essential to all that Powys was saying; he had to embody this kind of challenge to propriety. But whereas such lapses can be built into the cathartic rhythm and process of a live performance, can they become acceptable in literature?

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Our second witness, Henry Miller, attended these performances as a very young man, when Powys became his "first living idol";<sup>4</sup> and I believe Miller's own literary persona partly reflects that of Powys in his American lectures. Miller's autobiographical trilogy, *The Rosy Crucifixion*, is about a would-be writer whose promise appears less in his stories and essays than in monologues, sudden trance-like bursts of speech, to him mysterious and inexplicable, when he has access to an extraordinary fount of eloquence. In *Nexus* we hear of the first "revelatory" occasion this fit takes place in public. Miller finds himself speaking about Hamsun; the audience appears rapt, hypnotised, and Miller

himself emerges bewildered beside an admiring friend.

"Did it make sense? That's what I'd like to know."

"Make sense? Man, you were almost as good as Powys."<sup>5</sup>

The rhapsodic disquisitions that appear throughout Miller's writing, on Dostoevsky, on Matisse, on Spengler, and so on, do strongly resemble the kind of extravagant oratory he might have heard from Powys. What Miller comes to value most in literature, even to the extent of composing by dictaphone, is the spontaneous personal voice; so that the autobiographical monologue, which in Miller does deliberately incorporate "lapses" of all kinds, becomes the medium of all his work.

When Powys comes to write fiction it is of an entirely different kind. A book like *Nexus* helps us to realise how, by comparison, Powys's fiction remains that of a classical artist, whose style is relatively formal, creating and ordering an imaginative world. Those who admire Powys's *Autobiography* may regret his refusal in his fiction of the first person, but it was an important decision. It allows him, unlike Miller, to vary his fictional voice from novel to novel according to the demands of each autonomous world. And, perhaps more significantly, although Powys is at first forced to create a series of autobiographical protagonists, whose interior monologues form the substance of the earlier books, yet in his later work Powys begins to create archetypal and prophetic characters which touch on levels of experience that Miller's personal narrative cannot incorporate.

Yet I think there is an affinity of spirit at a deep level. For Miller as for Wilkinson, it was Powys's presentation of the image of a Holy Fool, of someone completely outside worldly interest, yet exposing himself to it, that moved him so much. "Friar John", he calls him. "Can neither be frocked nor defrocked. Is of no denomination, no caste or creed. Human, all-too-human."<sup>6</sup> What Miller and Powys share is an identification with lonely, vulnerable, loquacious outsiders, and the religious dimension in both

their writing does partly consist in this compassion. The literary exemplar lies of course in Dostoevsky, in that great gallery of Holy Fools, ranging from Myshkin in *The Idiot* to the dreamer of *White Nights* and the terrible voice of *Notes from Underground*. Powys and Miller would both accommodate in their different ways a similar gallery within their own fictional worlds.

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It seems to me this image of the Holy Fool is the key to Powys also as a novelist. In his *Autobiography*, Powys gives constant emphasis to himself as a grotesque—to his manias and phobias, his "idiotic" mouth and his "Neanderthal" brow, his uncoordinated movements and his helplessness in relation to any practical matter. He is "Mad John of Rats' Barn", a Zany and a clown. From his own account, it was his adolescence rather than his childhood that seems to have been crucial to his formation; and all his life he would present a persona that was disturbed, unfortunate, embarrassing, in the way an adolescent so often is. But for Powys self-liberation would come, not from suppressing or smoothing-over this embarrassing personality, but from articulating it in vivid performance.

I think this persona first grew in response specifically to the climate of English Upper Middle Class manners: the multiple snobberies, the extreme restraints and conventions, the cults of discretion, diffidence, understatement. There is the well-known episode when, as a persecuted misfit at Sherborne, Powys delivered to his assembled schoolfellows a confessional harangue so self-lacerating that it stunned even his tormentors into admiration. He was ill afterwards; but, he tells us:

The very morning after that eventful supper . . . when I made my shame to be my glory, my handsome enemy D - - - Ma. brought me—coming shyly into the sickroom—a bunch of violets.<sup>7</sup>

The discovery here consisted of much more than merely escape from persecution;

it was the discovery that by self-exposure he could become a catalyst, because beneath even the most hardened English mask there is a Dostoevskian naif waiting to be released. So Powys found that his socially divergent personality could, if rightly used, become a means of transforming society.

"The Fool", in the words of a contemporary Greek theologian, "is the charismatic man who has direct experience of the kingdom of God and undertakes to demonstrate in a prophetic way the antithesis of this present world with the world of the kingdom."<sup>8</sup> As a lecturer, Powys would speak from visionary experience, to challenge society; and as a writer, his role remained essentially unchanged. This is Fiction about Fools, written in the persona of a Fool, in order that we may ourselves become Fools.

Powys writes in the *Autobiography* of sexual neurosis, of sadism, of voyeurism; and of the physical affliction of a flow of gastric acid, of "the sickening moments of dead sea desolation that come to me from my ulcerated stomach". But whatever the cause, Powys's experience obviously veered between extremities of pain and pleasure; we can call it manic-depressive, or melancholic. So far as religious experience, experience of belief, is concerned, it is a condition that both gives and takes away. The sufferer finds that his experience is cyclic, that his most affirmative and integrated moments, his moments of release and happiness, come out of and are inextricably bound up with, his moments of emptiness and despair. It forced Powys early to recognise metaphysical dimensions, but it also made it very hard for him to have any stable or committed belief.

The unstable spirituality of Powys's persona as a lecturer obviously came out of this. And so, when he turns to fiction, Powys will create characters who are lonely and afflicted, who reflect his own pattern of passing between moments of causeless anguish to causeless happiness, just as the general structure of each book moves cyclically between illusion and disillusion. Religious experience is in the earlier books

limited to the momentary reconciliation with Nature which issues for each of these characters out of their despair. But from *A Glastonbury Romance* onwards, the "illusory" dimension in each book, the dimension of belief, takes a consistent mythological shape. It is in this mythology of Saturn's return and his attempt to reestablish a Golden Age that the prophetic intimations of Powys's persona as a Holy Fool will be realised.

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L.H. Myers defined religion as "what a man does with his solitariness".<sup>9</sup> In reading Theodore Powys's *Soliloquies of a Hermit* it becomes clear that although Theodore's pattern of experience closely resembles that of his brother (and there is evidence of a tendency to mental disturbance in several of the Powys family), yet Theodore interprets it in an entirely different way.

Theodore starts out from what he calls "the moods": man is defined as "a collection of atoms through which pass the moods of God". He elaborates this:

In the moods, in my moods, there are great and terrible happenings. In the most quiet places the moods of God rend and tear the heart. Every mood that passes through me is terrible, the most peaceful happy mood carries the heartache beneath it.<sup>10</sup>

In the earlier part of the book, these "moods" are presented as so overwhelming that one cannot possibly find a meaning in them; Theodore describes himself as a "priest", but:

A priest without a God. I am without a belief—a belief is too easy a road to God. (1)

Gradually, however, the *Soliloquies* begin to affirm a devotion to Christ, in distinction to God:

It is a little hard when God's moods shatter my belief in him, though no mood of God can take away the love of Christ. (39)

Moreover, he senses in himself a core which remains unaffected by his affliction:

My soul is a waiting, hesitating, longing silence . . . The soul is not chained to the moods; it is the waiting silence in us that is free. (95)

And in the final pages, Christ's role in this metaphysic at last becomes clear:

What he really did was to stand in the way of the eternal moods. He bade them get out of his way . . . When I think how oppressed we all are with the feelings that want to go on for ever, I do not know how I can thank Him enough that opened a way for our freedom. (118)

I think it will be clear that this vision, of redemption as a stillness, as the end to instability and emotionality, is absolutely foreign to the hopes of John Cowper, who more and more embraces the ideal of a "Multiverse" in constant flux, the older he becomes. Theodore's religion ends by denying his cyclic processes; John's makes a virtue of them.

Theodore's emphasis on stillness and silence also has consequences for his writing. The attitude of both brothers towards their art was deeply ambivalent; but John could at least regard his writing half-ironically as a late extension of his prophetic role. Theodore's long final years of silence are surely presaged in the imprecation to artists that ends the *Soliloquies*:

For was it not ever the moods and the feelings of man's deep black nature that gave the good workers in their creative art the chance to get human kind on the point of their pen? . . . Well, they will have to change, that is all. Jesus did not consider their love of God in his ways when he stood alone in all the Earth to face and destroy the moods. The artists that have for so long lived like vultures upon the broken flesh and rotten carcass of human despair must learn a new trade. (119)

So while John's response to the problems of his temperament is to extravert them to society in vivid and half-ridiculous performance, Theodore's is to turn inwards and away from any contact at all. Both are deeply convinced of the spiritual gain in renouncing worldly ambition, and both dramatise themselves in this role of the outsider, but to John's undignified zany and charlatan and magician, are contrasted Theodore's figures of "The Priest", "The Hermit", "The Monk", and of "Mr.

Thomas", who is despised by, but who also despises, the busy people around him. In Theodore's stance there is a kind of strength, but also a rigidity; John's is all weakness, but a weakness so articulated that it becomes healthy and liberating.

"By their fruits shall they be known." It is when we look at the shapes in which John and Theodore chose to embody their belief, that we realise how contrasted they are. Between Theodore's allegories and fables, tight in construction, purified in diction, simple in thought, and John's Romances, loose, informal, complex, a great chasm has been fixed; they mediate two entirely different attitudes to living. Theodore's archaisms are almost his exclusive cultural reference, making clear his debt to Bunyan and to the Bible, whereas John's style aims to accommodate "just everything", the most intimate vegetable and psychological perceptions fused with the most far-flung esoteric reference, the most up-to-date social, political, and aesthetic ideas. The emergence of Christ into the war-ravaged world of 1918 at the end of the *Soliloquies* marks Theodore's difficult reconciliation with the centrality of Christian Tradition, and even, to some extent, with the Church. For John there is no singleness of tradition, and so Christ must take his place in a world where absolutes may promise or threaten, but can never be victorious.

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John's most complete statement of belief is certainly to be found in *A Glastonbury Romance*. Religion in the theological sense had not bulked large in *Wolf Solent* or in any of the earlier fiction; Wolf has experiences that may be called "religious", but the perspective he represents is sceptical and uncommitted. Each of the four early novels had been dominated by a figure of a similar kind, the "Powys-hero", who resembles Powys as an outsider but completely lacks his validating public and prophetic role as a catalyst in society. In *A Glastonbury Romance* however the Powys-hero, at his most shifty and sceptical in

John Crow, soon drops out of the centre of the drama; and his place is taken by two explicitly religious seekers, Sam Dekker and John Geard. Geard is the first of a type who will recur in all the later books, alongside the Powys-hero; the prophet-figure who will culminate in Myrddin/Cronos of *Porius*. It seems that Powys first felt the need at this point to accommodate in this new kind of character the prophetic aspect of his own grotesquery. This splitting-off, in effect, of two different possibilities in himself establishes the tension between illusion and disillusion which defines Powys's religious position in all the books which follow.

Sam, on the other hand, is a character unique in Powys (and he appears from Powys's letters to be exceptionally a "borrowed" character, based on a friend of his brother Littleton's who had actually seen the Grail).<sup>11</sup> He is a raw, chinless youth who is, we are repeatedly told, basically commonplace in intellect and temperament, but who undergoes a conversion early in the novel to become a transcendent figure, "Holy Sam". Powys's ambivalence towards Christianity is everywhere evident. Sam's initial transformation has partly a sexual cause. His religious impulses:

had not been created by his passion for Nell. But the girl's having gone back to Zoyland's bed had been a shock to his deepest pride; and by his gesture of complete renunciation he was in some subtle way recovering his threatened life-illusion.<sup>12</sup>

In this earlier phase, Sam's religion reflects his unbalance: as Mr. Evans recognises:

This man's Christ is a madman like I am . . . He's all strain and torment . . . I ought never to have spoken to this man. (853)

And there is also the remarkable scene where Nell, after reading and burning one of her brother's Marxist pamphlets, instinctively equates Sam's Christianity with Marxism, as denying the value or right of the individual. (476-477)

But Sam changes. All his life he has been a student of natural history, and early in the book, as he leans against an oak-tree, we hear of

an increasing rapprochement in these latter modern days between certain abnormal human beings and the sub-human organisms of nature. (116)

Nearly a year later, living as a poor labourer,

Sam had begun to notice with a puzzled wonder that certain unpromising and unlikely objects gave him, as he glanced casually at them, thrilling spasms of a quivering happiness. (977)

And it will be in one such "unpromising object", an old barge-post, that Sam's vision of the Grail will have its origin. To the extent that the Grail-experience, as it occurs either to Sam or Mary, is not portrayed as essentially different from that nature-experience all Powys's characters receive, its specific, let alone Christian, character is put in doubt. Its effect on Sam is to bring about a "rapprochement" and a self-acceptance that alters his religious view. As Sam affirms,

There's a Christ in matter that is nearer the Grail than the Christ of The Church. (987)

It is left to the procuress, Mother Legge, to point out the contradiction in denying a personal god yet preaching a Grail containing his blood. Or, as Powys insinuates, could the Grail be not only pre-Christian, but "a thing of magic and not of religion" (1024) and Sam's ultimate belief not a religious one at all?

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Although Powys keeps Sam largely out of contact with Geard's activities throughout the book (Sam having refused John Crow's enthusiastic offer of the part of Simon Peter in Geard's pageant), yet to the reader Sam and Geard must present two contrasted quests. In relation to Christianity, whereas Sam in his humility and asceticism attempts the "Imitation" of Christ, Geard in his miracle-working role in effect *becomes* Christ. Both are heretical (and it is significant that nowhere in Powys is there an impressive Christian within the Church), yet whereas Sam's heresy is private, Geard explicitly challenges the Church, as founder

of his new Glastonbury religion, and expounder of his "Fifth Gospel". In this contrast between two Holy Fools, one who pursues a saint's solitary path, the other who embraces the role of prophet, I think we have to say that Powys is unmistakably closer to Geard. The portrait of Sam is subtle and deeply-felt; but we leave him abruptly after his Grail-experience, and when we glimpse him again it is only briefly, toiling beside his father in the flood, and seen through the eyes of Geard, as a very ordinary young man.

It is these last pages that really assert Geard's place as Powys's most rounded character, and Geard comes finally to be larger and more real than his religion. This religion is however interesting as an at least half-serious attempt by Powys to resolve his genuine conflicts about the relation between Christianity and the pre-Christian deities, and between mythology, religion, and magic. In Geard's synthesis, Glastonbury and her history provides the unifying factor, and when her three mythical deposits are brought together in the Pageant, it is implied they are equivalent. But there are ambiguities; in the first, Arthurian, episode, Geard insists that Merlin, because he is a figure "too sacred" to Glastonbury, be left out—although Christ can be unblushingly presented in the person of Mr. Evans, with a French clown gagging at the foot of the cross. What would the third, Celtic episode have consisted of, had Mr. Evans not collapsed? And who was Geard invoking when, having pacified the strikers, he exhorted the Pageant's audience to pray to "the Christ of Glastonbury"?

With *Porius* and other late works to help us, both Mr. Geard and the God of whom he is a prophet can be recognised as earlier models for that retelling of the Saturn myth, of the god who attempts to bring about a Golden Age, which will provide the theme for all the romances from *Maiden Castle* onwards. Perhaps the most potent episode in the whole book is Geard's visit to Mark's Court, which, it is underlined, takes place on the morning of Christ's resurrection. Geard's vigil passed in a chamber haunted

by Merlin is an initiation; and his cry of "Nineue" expresses not only his empathy with the imprisoned enchanter, but his having taken to himself Merlin's identity. His subsequent prayer, "Give me the strength to change the whole course of human nature upon Earth" (456), is the prayer of an incarnate deity, a "Christ of Glastonbury" who, following Christ and Merlin and Cronos and the Celtic Bran, will be prepared in the flood to commit suicide and renounce his power as a redemptive act.

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The structure of *A Glastonbury Romance* is basically tied to the pattern of the year, beginning and ending at the Spring Solstice. There is a cyclic inevitability about the growth and decline of events, beginning with Geard's inheritance, the setting up of a commune, and, at midsummer, the Pageant; the flowering of a mystical response in various characters, and yet, as the religious vegetation becomes more and more lush, a sense of lost vitality; then the sudden entry into Winter, Death and Drowning in the Flood, with the final promise of Rebirth. The obvious source for this aspect of the plotting was Jesse Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, which Powys is known to have read; and there seems to be an intention here to revive the old mythical articulation of the year, with Geard as Sacrificial King. But the sense of disillusion at the end of the book goes beyond that demanded by the rhythm of the year, and has a more specific source in Powys's reading of Welsh mythology, which, although less visible, underpins *A Glastonbury Romance* as deeply as any of the later narratives.

Sir John Rhys's *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* is basically etymology, an impenetrable shifting melange of names, but etymology charged with Rhys's vision of a Celtic Nationhood. The general atmosphere of this mythological tanglewood, where, as Rhys admists, there is "an impossibility of

drawing any hard and fast distinction between certain characters", is clearly one source for that shifting complexity of all Powys's mythology, most of all in *Porius*.

It was certainly Rhys who gave Powys that conception of Glastonbury, voiced by Mr. Evans:

Few Glastonbury people realise that they are actually living in *Yr Echwydd*, the land of *Annwyn*, the land of twilight and death.<sup>13</sup>

In Rhys, the Welsh are said to have two notions of the realm of the dead, either as an island beyond the sea, or as being inside a hill or mound, and, as he points out,

Glastonbury might be said to admit of both descriptions. For the water and swamps around Glastonbury made it into an island, while the hill now known as Glastonbury Tor would form a fairy hill.<sup>14</sup>

Rhys assigns this realm to the overlapping deities of Pryderi and, significantly for *Maiden Castle*, Urien.

In Urien's realm Urien is a Great Monarch. His castles are of imposing proportions, and his country seems an Elysium; but the onslaught of the sun-hero reduces the sable-chief's dimensions, levels his castles with the ground and exposes his realm as the abode of desolation. For the name of that realm is *Yr Echwydd*, the evening and the dusk, the twilight which is essential to the illusion and glamour on which this whole cosmos of unreality is founded.<sup>15</sup>

Powys's emphasis on Glastonbury's blue twilights, which provide the leitmotif for several chapters, ending with that fatal strolling out of poor Tom Barter and his companions to see the twilight from the Tor, is here explained: it represents the illusoriness of Geard's realm. And within this mythological scheme, it is clear that Glastonbury's rise as a great religious centre will demand its sweeping away in the flood.

The appearance of Pryderi's realm as a wilderness and a desolation is its true aspect . . . The removal of the Enchantment, so as to make the landscape teem again with life and abundance, is more truly to put the Enchantment on it.<sup>16</sup>

It is easy to understand how all this

magic of Enchantment and Disenchantment would have appealed to Powys, as a mythology embodying his unstable consciousness. And Rhys gave Powys another important constituent. He quotes a mysterious passage from Plutarch:

Moreover, there is there they said, an island in which Cronos is imprisoned, with Briareus keeping guard over him as he sleeps; for as they put it, Sleep is the bond forged for Cronos.

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In 1925, Powys had been invited to write down the gist of a lecture he had delivered on the theme of "an Aesthetic view of Religion", which he now published under the title *The Religion of A Sceptic*. Powys details three stages through which the initiate of this religion must pass—emotional belief, metaphysical belief and absolute disillusionment—before he can reach what Powys calls "aesthetic understanding". From this position, all religion will then appear as "a creation of poetry and the imagination"; and any argument about historic or literal truth will seem irrelevant, "utterly outworn and tedious". The argument can be summed up in Powys's declaration, that,

What our instinctive human nature demands is mythology not theology.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously one may view *A Glastonbury Romance* as a kind of processing of the reader through these stages of belief and disillusionment. Sam might possibly be viewed as finally arriving at a view rather close to this, once he has lost his personal God; but it is more in the general shape of the book. Revelations occur in every chapter, and to almost every character, but we are not left at the end with any certainty to hold for ourselves. The effect is to build up a rhythm which conveys a view of the patterning of experience, rather than any stable creed. "Backward and forwards; for five thousand years, the great pendulum has swung between belief in the Glastonbury legend

and disbelief.<sup>19</sup> The master-thought of the book is expressed in its final formula, that "the lies of great creative nature give birth to truth that is to be". For, whether religion is true or not, says Powys, it is necessary:

*Any lie*, so long as a multitude of souls believes it and presses it to the cracking point, creates new life.<sup>20</sup>

So we have at the end to recognise the "absolute disillusionment" created by the final chapters of *A Glastonbury Romance* as only a step towards a wider view; and a wider view that is ultimately optimistic and affirmative. The way in which disillusionment carried for Powys not despairing, but prophetic intimations, is made explicit in an essay of 1916 on Anatole France.

Disillusionment is the mark of civilised eras as opposed to barbaric ones, and if the dream of the poets is ever realised, and the Golden Age returns, such an age will be the supreme age of happy, triumphant disillusion.<sup>21</sup>

This idea of a Golden Age achieved through disillusionment was to be the thought-structure of all the later Fictions.

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Later in the Anatole France essay, Powys had opposed his variety of "disillusion" to the aggression of the rationalist, or even of Nietzsche. By contrast, he suggests,

The real disillusioned spirit plays with illusions, puts and takes them off, lightly, gaily, just as it happens, just as the moment demands.<sup>22</sup>

To some extent, then, the extraordinary bric-a-brac of deities and powers within *A Glastonbury Romance* are necessary to all that is being said. Yet there was also, I believe, beyond this doctrinal need, to include "any lie", a personal need. *A Glastonbury Romance* attempts a comprehensive survey of all Powys's experience, and he had been closely acquainted with the cranky and heretical and esoteric most of his life. For example—as a very partial catalogue; his cousin Ralph Shirley was Editor of *The Occult*; various friends, including Franklin Playter, were also occultists; through Louis Wilkinson's mutual

friendship Powys was kept up-to-date with the activities of Aleister Crowley, with his abbey of Thelema, his proclamation of his own divinity, and his sex-magic. Powys's early interest in Theosophy would have given him insight into how a new religious synthesis comes about, while Annie Besant's career became, like Geard's, partly political. By 1930, Krishnamurti, no longer a Man-God, was expounding a view of religion whose sceptical spirituality closely parallels Powys's own; and Rudolf Steiner had built his amazing wooden "Goethenaem" in Switzerland, which offers one possible model for Geard's "Rotunda". Finally, it may be worth recalling that Glastonbury was in the news in 1929, when a Mrs. Katherine Maltwood published her discovery of "The Glastonbury Zodiac", an astrological chart she believed to be spelt out by the hills and field-patterns surrounding the Tor.

Powys's clearest statement of his religious position at the time he was writing the Romance occurs in a letter to A.R. Orage.<sup>23</sup> Orage was a disciple of Gurdjieff at Fontainebleau, though he had earlier been a Nietzschean and editor of *The New Age*, as well as a distinguished literary critic. In New York in 1930, he had visited Powys and Phyllis Playter; and Powys now thanks him, describing their meeting as "the greatest event of our winter in Patchen Place"; he goes on to declare his distaste for most sectarian positions:

There's something so "fixed-up", so unctuous and conceited, about these Indian swamis and esoteric teachers; just as there is about Christian Scientists, something that is unilluminating and does not vibrate to the shocks of real life, something that seems to face life through wads of cotton-wool.

Powys contrasts to this, the spirituality of Orage himself, "fresh and natural and troubling as all genuine attitudes to life ought to be":

you did not convert us one inch . . . to your particular Gods or rituals or doctrines or master—but you compelled us and still compel us to accept yourself in your present mood as one possessed of some extraordinary psychic secret.

This acceptance and recognition of the existence of personalities who carry some element of the divine does surely illuminate the role of Geard, and his successors in the later books. Powys himself had come across to many as a figure of this kind. Through Geard, he could affirm how certain individuals, whether we call them "magus" or "prophet", do mediate a mysterious power that can affect all those with whom they come in contact. At this point, in the catalytic personality, religion, magic, and myth may be seen to meet.

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After *A Glastonbury Romance* Powys remained uncommitted for the remainder of his life. He explained to E.H. Visiak in 1943,

It's unnatural to me to have any system, and I can't conscientiously invent one for aesthetic purposes! I am a person of no convictions but many prejudices, of no principles but several virtues, of no love but enduring faithfulness.<sup>24</sup>

*A Glastonbury Romance* had marked the nearest Powys was prepared to go towards Christianity, and towards committed belief. The schemes of later books, right down to *Atlantis* and *The Brazen Head*, have the same character of a Battleground of Religions, but Christians or mainstream religion were never again of much importance. With this cutting back of the

church's complex accretions, we get to an earlier, altogether harsher, world; religion gives way more and more to myth, and *Porius* is almost as primitive and factual as the *Mabinogion* itself. The losses are considerable, but so are the gains, and both are seen most clearly in Powys's prophetic figures. Geard is a much more detailed, warmer, more human character than his successors, but he does lack some of their authority and mystery. Geard is not, after all, so far from the many homely small-town divinities who peopled the art of the thirties, as in Stanley Spencer's Cookham or like Theodore Powys's vintner, "Mr. Weston". But there is nothing remotely folksy about Myrddin Wyllt.

Mythology not Theology. The paradox, that as Powys moves more clearly away from religion, the divinity of his magus figures takes on a more and more looming conviction, is I think resolved by the role of this figure; of Cronos as the god whose Golden Age would bring an end to all gods and rulers. He is the god whose power is to renounce all power, the God of Disillusionment. So one of Powys's central achievements, first in *A Glastonbury Romance* and more and more explicitly from *Maiden Castle* onwards, is to realise this "disillusionment" imaginatively in a myth, a creative lie, that can help to bring to birth a liberated future.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The Buffoon* (1916), Village Press, 1975, p. 10.  
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 418-419.  
<sup>3</sup> P. 143.  
<sup>4</sup> "The Immortal Bard", *A Review of English Studies*, January 1963, p. 24.  
<sup>5</sup> *Nexus* (Paris, 1960), Panther, 1966, p. 268.  
<sup>6</sup> "The Immortal Bard", p. 23.  
<sup>7</sup> *Autobiography* (1934), 1967, p. 156.  
<sup>8</sup> C. Yannaras, quoted by J. Seward, "The Fool for Christ's Sake", *Christian*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1975.  
<sup>9</sup> L.H. Myers, *The Near and the Far*, 2 vols., 1935 and 1940.  
<sup>10</sup> T. F. Powys, *Soliloquies of a Hermit* (1918), Village Press, 1975, p. 8. In my subsequent discussion numerals in parentheses with quotations from the *Soliloquies* refer to pages in this edition.  
<sup>11</sup> See the letters to Littleton printed as an Appendix to *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. B. Humfrey, University of Wales Press, 1972, p. 324.  
<sup>12</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, 1933, p. 261. Sub-

sequent numerals in parentheses in my text refer to pages in this edition.

- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 771.  
<sup>14</sup> J. Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, Oxford, 1891, p. 330.  
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.  
<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368, quoted in *A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 342.  
<sup>18</sup> *The Religion of a Sceptic*, New York, 1925, p. 33.  
<sup>19</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, p. 779.  
<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 931.  
<sup>21</sup> *Suspended Judgements*, 1916, p. 171.  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.  
<sup>23</sup> Philip Mairet, *A.R. Orage, a memoir*, 1936, pp. 101-103.  
<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Professor Robert Blackmore and the staff of Colgate University Library for allowing me to view these letters.

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# Glen Cavaliero

## Phoenix and Serpent: D. H. Lawrence and John Cowper Powys

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### I

No author worth his salt likes to be compared with another one, for all authors worth their salt are unique. And yet that truth is limited. Not only does every writer belong to a social complex and an economic structure, but also and more importantly for the artist, he inherits a shared mental world of archetypes and memories. To compare two such disparate writers as John Cowper Powys and D.H. Lawrence might at first sight seem an idle enterprise belittling to the individuality of both; but if this is done with an eye to what lies behind their respective creative achievements it can reveal more than mere contrasts and correspondence. I am not therefore here concerned primarily with questions of mutual influence (indeed there seems to me to be little or none) but with charting two complementary approaches to reality. Both writers stand out among their fellow novelists by their single-minded response to the natural order, and both, perhaps as a result of this, have gathered fervent disciples. Powys has only just begun to gain academic respectability while (probably it would have been to his dismay) a different fate has overtaken Lawrence. He has become an orthodoxy.

Both writers are among those who challenge and involve their readers at the deepest level. Powys himself readily acknowledged an alliance. Writing to Nicholas Ross in August 1956, he recalls an embarrassing moment in one of his Boston lectures.

An English well-known writer . . . asked me if I'd ever read D.H. Lawrence. And I had to confess I never had! O I did feel and still do,

such a fool, for this English Writer explained to MY audience what D.H.L. stood for and it was JUST what I then and *still* 'stand for'.<sup>1</sup>

This ignorance was to be remedied and in September 1955 we find him speaking to Louis Wilkinson of his "terrific devotion" to D.H. Lawrence. It is unlikely, however, that Lawrence would have returned the admiration, for Powys dealt in modes of consciousness and behaviour that were antipathetic to him. Admirers of the one man have seldom admired the other equally. But the likeness between them which Powys noticed is as illuminating as the difference, and makes a comparison between them something more than a citation of random parallels.

But the parallels are there, for the course of their lives had curious similarities. Both lives were peripatetic after beginning in the northern Midlands, where Powys was born in 1872 in a comfortable rectory and Lawrence in 1886 in a miner's cottage; and they concluded with an odd reversal, Lawrence ending his days in a small villa on the French Riviera and Powys living out his in a still smaller miner's cottage in North Wales, not so unlike that in which Lawrence was born. But the intermediate journeyings had different motivations, for what was the result of an intense inner restlessness in Lawrence was the necessary result of Powys's career as a lecturer, and when the latter was able to do so he settled down instinctively. Both men avoided the world of literary politics and were regarded as outsiders by that world, Powys not even being involved in it as Lawrence initially was; and both were familiar with America and wrote about its literature, an experience which helped to free them from the narrow perspectives of more obviously

"literary" figures. Geographically their American homes could not have been more distant, however; and the contrast between the ranch at Taos and Powys's leafy retreat in the Catskill mountains indicates a temperamental difference between them which goes deep.

Both men were essentially preachers; and in Lawrence we can see the perhaps unconscious influence of his Nonconformist upbringing, so different from the calm Anglicanism of Powys's youth. But if Powys lacked Lawrence's urgency as an evangelist, he was none the less a public speaker of powerful eloquence (which Lawrence was not) and endowed with powers that would have been at home in some Welsh hillside chapel. But he was more concerned to celebrate than to convert, and still more to enquire and marvel: it is the combination of his actual scepticism with the forceful presentation of what may be called his provisional findings which makes him so baffling a writer for those accustomed to close reasoned argument by reiteration—the method employed by Lawrence. Lawrence changes his tack from book to book, and his entire output may be read as a progressive worrying-out of beliefs and insights that were constantly being tested through his own life. It is thus a creative and renewing business to read him, and his readers share in his phoenix-like powers of renewal. Compared with him Powys appears serpentine and even dishonest or insincere; but the apparent frivolity conceals an equal seriousness of intent, though one which being motivated differently finds a different mode of expression.

Indeed the quest for the secret of life led the two men in opposite directions. To generalise, one might say that Lawrence is always trying to fight his way out in his search for that secret, while for Powys the search is essentially a matter of going back to roots, evading all traps and opposition as he does so. For Lawrence the quest involved a physical removal not only from the country of his boyhood but from England itself; his life became a vain search for a place in

which to settle. But his quest was also concerned with a philosophy of life that would provide a way out of the muddle and degradation of the industrialised societies of the West. Powys, on the other hand, was out to tap the root of man's being. For him sanity lay in going back, not in the derogatory sense of retrogression but as a return to the true source of human nature. One can trace this movement in his fiction, an obsession with his own past in the early novels developing into a concern with the past behind that past, with the past of the Welsh people and that of the human race itself. There are geographical parallels to this in the lives of the two men. Lawrence's move from industrial Nottinghamshire was by way of the deserts of New Mexico, where, if anywhere, he found his ideal, to the cradle of Western civilisation by the Mediterranean shore. (*Etruscan Places* is perhaps the book by Lawrence which is the nearest to Powys's feelings and sympathies.) It is a move towards a civilised ideal, a return to an alien past, and then back again. Powys is more deliberate. His final move to the mountainous recesses of North Wales was an appropriate outcome of his study of the Welsh language and history; it mirrors his quest for what he felt to be an ancient wisdom, for his own origins and a release from the evils of the present by a renewed contact with the past.

The progress of Lawrence's life made him aware of the workings of society in a way that Powys was not (for all the latter's interest in the events of his time and, in his later years, in Welsh affairs): he had a unique capacity for relating the immediately personal to its social implications, seen most clearly in such works as *St Mawr* and "The Captain's Doll". But he is less successful in allowing for the element of class background and attitudes where it affected himself: as Scott Sanders points out, "Time after time . . . Lawrence proffers moral or psychological explanations of incidents which he has already given us evidence for interpreting sociologically."<sup>2</sup> This is something which, for all his more esoteric content, Powys

never does. He is alert to the social niceties of the world of which he writes, even though that world is in many ways more restricted than that of Lawrence. It is very specifically a middle class world, that world which preserved late Victorian attitudes and responses well into the inter-war years, the world which Powys has been castigated anachronistically for so faithfully observing.<sup>3</sup> In *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* we find it observed with what he himself would have called "scrupulous nicety" by one who knew it from within—but also by one who can observe it with a humorous detachment.

Perhaps because of this Powys writes with great sympathy of outsiders, of the solitary or misfit; and the *Autobiography* shows us that to feel that he was one himself was a necessary part of his life-illusion. But Lawrence endured this experience in a more painful manner, and much of what he writes stems from a sense of his difference from other people. That difference was not so much psychological (as it was for Powys) as social and moral; and the effect upon him of the suppression of *The Rainbow* and of his wartime experiences in Cornwall was to be permanent. Powys suffered no such alienation, despite the inattention of literary critics and the libel suit that swallowed up all his profits from *A Glastonbury Romance*; and this is reflected in his style. Whereas Lawrence often seems to be writing *at* his readers, Powys always adopts the stance of writing *for* them; he assumes their collusion just as he assumes that organised society is necessarily hostile to the freedom of the human spirit. Lawrence seems to write out of a sense of disappointment, but Powys accepts the worst from the beginning and goes on from there; and where Lawrence sought for some ideal order, he was more attracted to the idea of anarchy. Fundamentally more pessimistic than Lawrence he lacked Lawrence's trust in the spirit of community, and was as a result less frustrated where social questions were concerned. He was not interested in political Utopias. His attitude to authority

was always detached and faintly mocking, and the men of action in his novels are for the most part objects of amused and occasionally angry satire: some of them, such as Owen Glendower and Odysseus, renounce power altogether. Indeed this attitude to authority may have been one way of containing his own sense of disappointment, if disappointment he felt, over his lack of literary success. Be that as it may, it is perfectly exemplified by his amused recounting of Alfred de Kantzow's dictum, "Powys, we must propitiate Magnates" or by his observation that,

Our secret, natural attitude (to God) is not, 'holy' at all. It is not grave or pious or consecrated. It is whimsical, sly, stubborn, wayward, all by turns; it is changeable as the wind; it is essentially profane.<sup>4</sup>

Powys had a sense of irony based on what was an almost patrician self-assurance, an irony which is the very opposite of Lawrence's caustic or sardonic style. He is amused where Lawrence hates (indeed Powys writes badly when he hates, becoming over emphatic and a ranter: he lacked Lawrence's superb astringency) and it is instructive to compare the treatment of Wolf Solent's mother with Lawrence's portrait of Mrs Witt in *St Mawr*.

There is a strong note of humour in both these portraits. Though neither writer can be thought of primarily as a comic artist, F.R. Leavis has claimed that Lawrence is one of the great masters of comedy<sup>5</sup> and Wilson Knight that Powys is our foremost authority on great humour.<sup>6</sup> Both claims may seem exaggerated, but both have some basis. Lawrence, especially in the tales and in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the early chapters of *The Lost Girl*, displays an elegant mockery of contemporary attitudes that is deft and bracing; while Powys can recount with slow elaboration some example of human grotesquerie that is positively liberating in its acceptance of the incongruous. Lawrence's humour is an attack on false standards, a critique of "reason" in the name of superior reason; Powys's humour is a celebration of anarchy in the name of joy. And whereas Lawrence at

times recalls a small boy in his dogged attention to the object in view, his jeering element of teasing (a form of humour Powys detested), Powys's humour is more like that of small children, absorbed, uncritical and essentially innocent of intent beyond itself. Lawrence at his worst becomes a bully, Powys at his is merely childish.

## II

In speaking of the quest element in their writings I have suggested that Lawrence always seems trying to work his way out, while Powys is always trying to work his way back and in. As a way of describing the method of their search this account may stand; but for an accurate portrayal of the drives behind it, the ascriptions would have to be reversed. The whole emphasis in Lawrence's philosophy lies on getting *in*: into the inner fibres of human nature so that he may understand how humanity functions and relate its present ways of life to that function. His imagery is that of darkness, birth and rebirth, of cycles and of penetration. He is drawn to the unconscious through a demanding analysis of the conscious.

Powys, on the other hand, is psychologically more concerned with getting "up and out". His interest lies with the ethereal, with the imagination and the mental life of fantasy. And although he is attracted to the primitive and inanimate, the result is always a heightened personal awareness. Lawrence was attracted to the primitive in the hope of diminishing self-consciousness, Powys in the hope of increasing it. And where Lawrence responds most strongly to animals, and to earth and fire, Powys responds most strongly to vegetation, and his elements are air and water. Where Lawrence writes eloquently in praise of the sun, Powys is attracted to the moon; indeed in the *Glastonbury Romance* he portrays the sun as the enemy of man. But it is worth noting that Lawrence's male protagonists tend to be light and delicate in

build—one thinks of Paul Morel, Rupert Birkin, Mellors the gamekeeper, Don Cipriano; while Powys's contemplatives are for the most part big-boned and slow—Wolf Solent, Dud-No-Man, John Geard and Porius come immediately to mind. Once again we find a complementing of forces.

These observations lead me to coin two words which may serve to sum up the difference in outlook and temperament between Powys and Lawrence. They indicate two contrasting types of human being, types who are not really summed up by the terms introvert and extrovert. The word 'penetralist' indicates those who instinctively involve themselves with their fellow human beings, who respond immediately to sensual stimuli, for whom concentration, immersion in the present moment comes naturally. They find their selfhood in an intense engagement with the objects of their experience. But there is an opposite type who may be called the cerebralist. He has a natural leaning towards solitude, lives intensely in his imagination; and his sense impressions tend to be diffuse. His concern is less with immediate reality than with that which lies behind it; in religious matters he has an absorbing sense of the transcendent, just as the penetralist is sensitive to the immanent. But the religious category in Lawrence and Powys is less significant in this respect than are their attitudes to society, to the world of nature and to sex. It is in connection with these that the terms I have used seem most to the point.

Any reader of Lawrence must rapidly become aware of his close involvement with the society in which he lived.<sup>7</sup> That involvement did, however, paradoxically result in a keen sense of personal social alienation, just as Powys's detachment in practise ended up in unflinching hospitality and an enormous circle of correspondents. Again and again we are made aware of the complementary nature of the two men's characters and experience—a complementation which it would have delighted Powys to admit; Lawrence, an 'either-or'

man where Powys was for 'both-and', would not have seen the point of it. But the ambiguous nature of Lawrence's own social position as a member of the newly educated working class brought up to have middle class standards meant that for him to understand the society in which he lived he had also to understand his own social limitations. He was in fact involved in a running battle with himself, and the ferocity of his social analyses, the regular interjection of hortatory matter into his most delicate prose, the nagging of his characters and with them of his readers—all these elements which mar his work—may be seen as the result of this inner division. The mother, with whom as a person he identified emotionally, herself personified those ideals and standards which, in the name of a deeper allegiance to the life-force embodied in his father, he felt bound to reject. (It is, incidentally, of interest to note that although it was their mothers who quickened these two writers' intellectual interests, it was to their fathers that they turned for mythological significance, Lawrence associating his with the dark, the mine, the cave, while Powys described his as "monumental" and writes of him in a way that suggests less a cavern than a mountain—again, the terms are complementary.) But when Lawrence is writing at his best he can penetrate sympathetically into the heart of his images, so that they embody the forces he is seeking to understand. His natural empathy with the animal world serves him well, and striking examples of his instinctively parabolic mastery of narrative can be found in such episodes as that of Gerald and the mare in *Women in Love* or the description of the bull fight in *The Plumed Serpent*. He has a particular responsiveness to the rhythms of daily domestic routine which he shares to some extent with Powys, and which is used to notable effect in the descriptions of the farm and its life in *The Rainbow*. His tactile sense witnesses to a nature that is concerned primarily with losing its sense of separated identity and with blending with the world in which it finds itself. It is in the

name of this responsiveness, which he believed to be man's natural inheritance, that Lawrence criticised the society of his day—just as he stands as a rebuke to ours. With an unerring instinct he located its unnaturalness in its exploitation by abstraction of that from which it physically derived. The account of the working of the mines in *Women in Love* is an outstanding example of Lawrence's analytical imagination working at full stretch, a piece of writing unforgettable alike from its force and from its justice. His stature as a social critic does not diminish with the years.

This kind of attitude towards society was never Powys's, though he agreed with Lawrence's diagnosis. His own imagination was not of this penetrating, analytic kind; which is perhaps why, when he does attack something of which he disapproves, like vivisection, he is reduced too frequently to rant. One agrees with the purport of his remarks while being alienated by their manner. Where Lawrence felt himself, for all his occasional protests, to be personally involved in his society's problems, Powys remains detached. This is not to say that he did not respond to and enjoy the physical aspects of daily life or take a keen interest in contemporary events; his novels give the lie to the first charge and the letters to the second. But he is always more concerned with the individual than with the organisation of society. He is among those who

cannot regard a life as a brick in a social structure, but only as a way . . . out of the mystery, into the mystery again.<sup>8</sup>

Lawrence is in fact another; but his suspicion of the life of the inner imagination goes deep. Powys understood that suspicion (the character of Dave Spear in *A Glastonbury Romance* gives voice to it) but it is overridden by his greater suspicion of human organisations and their power to crush the individual spirit. Many of his characters are drop-outs, albeit middle-class drop-outs with small private incomes; and there is an underlying pessimism about human social aspirations underlying everything he wrote, his sympathy with the

Communist ideal notwithstanding. If he had a motto it was "In Spite Of" and his approach to social issues is essentially pragmatic. It is for this reason that his imagination fails to engage with certain subjects which intellectually interest him; and the political aspects of *Wood and Stone* and *A Glastonbury Romance* are the weakest parts of those novels. Indeed the logical outcome of his bent is seen in *Maiden Castle* where political philosophies are attributed to individual spokesmen and left at that. There is no attempt to relate them dynamically to the action of the novel.

There is much of the fatalist or stoic about Powys; Lawrence, more deeply Christian, is restless, wants to fight back, protests against acquiescence. But where he plunges into the issues of his time and is in perpetual response to his own reactions, Powys asserts the primacy of the individual imagination, and the most he is prepared to say seems in the end to amount to the simple message that if happiness in the fullest sense were recognised as a primary human and moral goal, then the individual has the power to overcome all but the most physical of ills. The weakness of his position is that it is too rooted in his own temperamental needs. He makes insufficient allowance for aggression, sublimating his own to an extent that, it is tempting to assert, made him mistake it for a sadism which was in fact self-inflicted. But his serpentine, introverted mind was to triumph over such complexities. And he always proceeded from the dictum, Know Thyself. This Lawrence does not do. It is inconceivable that he could have written *Autobiography*.

### III

Enough has perhaps already been said about the attitudes of Powys and Lawrence to the natural world. Lawrence is primarily concerned with the livingness of nature; it is sap, flowering, engendering that interest him, and his work is full of a sense of activity. As much as Hardy he insists on the

indifference of nature to human concerns, but unlike Hardy he sees man as finding his true self in communion with those non-human forces—and this response we find contained in Powys's work as well, though along with much else. The attraction of primitive cults and civilisations to Lawrence lay in their promise of new experience, in their total otherness from the civilisation of the West; and it is most powerfully conveyed in the magnificent dramatic fable *St Mawr*. The main target of his attack both here and elsewhere is the sterility of modern cerebral consciousness—the characters of Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love* and Sir Clifford in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* being his most notable personifications of it. A very different attitude is found in Powys's work. He is at one with Lawrence in his hatred of the contemporary scientific humanist philosophy; but for him cerebration is of the essence of life. Nor is he afraid of sterility; in the world of nature it is the inanimate which moves him most. He does, it is true, have a marvellous sense of the richness and fecundity of the vegetable world, but it is wood, stone, rock which call out his most eloquent writing, these and effects of weather, climate, colouring, everything that is known through the eye. (Lawrence is more sensitive to touch.) Above all Powys is interested in the inter-action between beholder and beheld, with what human beings make of the landscapes in which they have their being. Compared with Lawrence there is little frontal, visual description in his work, and nothing to compare with Lawrence's travel books; but in the portrayal of the psychic emanations of place he is unexcelled. He has nothing to match Lawrence's descriptions of the Australian interior or the plateaux of New Mexico; but Lawrence has nothing to match the woodland worlds of *Ducdame* or *Porius*. Nor can Lawrence follow Powys into the realms of paranormal phenomena such as we find in the great Mark's Court chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance*; when he tries to, in stories like "The Rocking-Horse Winner" or "The Lovely Lady", the results are relatively conventional. His view of

nature takes insufficient account of subjectivity. He was concerned to get inside the world of nature, to penetrate into its livingness: Powys, for all his immense receptivity, his excessive receptivity one might almost say, remains outside it. He recreates what he sees; he cerebralises.

Nowhere is this difference between the two men more open than in their attitudes to sex. It is here that the contrast between the penetralist and the cerebralist is most illuminating. Lawrence is predominantly concerned with the *roles* played by the sexes, with the relation of male to female. The theme is to some extent confused in *Sons and Lovers* by the dominant role played by the mother, and the emphasis on the father's passivity in the household life. But in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the confusion of male and female roles is presented as something deadly to the human spirit. Lawrence is here characteristically exploring his own domestic problems; however, he takes the matter far beyond its immediate personal occasion. He pillories the woman who seeks to play the masculine role as he conceives it to be; and in this novel, and in *Women in Love* and *The Plumed Serpent* he would seem to urge the final burning out of shame through the acceptance of delight even in "the place of excrement". Today it is the emphasis on male domination which is more likely to call forth protests rather than any specific interpretations of Lawrence's strenuous rhetoric; yet it is notable that the sexual encounters in his novels are usually described from the woman's point of view.

Powys, while in the *Autobiography* emphasising his own femininity, is less concerned than is Lawrence with the playing of sexual roles, and this despite the sensitive account of the love-making of Sam Dekker and Nell Zoyland in *A Glastonbury Romance*. Rather, he portrays sex as the manifestation of the individual's role-playing to himself, and assumes a hermaphroditic element in human nature, in contrast with Lawrence's polarisations. It is this which accounts for the prominent part

played by erotic fantasies in the novels; here his work anticipates that of Genet. The sexual ambivalances and neuroses that for some people disfigure his novels are in fact a witness to his belief in the sovereign power of the imagination as being at the heart of any fully human experience.

Where Lawrence explores the realm of the sub-conscious Powys explores the hyper-conscious. It is, I think, this hyper-consciousness which he characterises (in a non-condemnatory way) as "vicious" in his account of the love-making of John and Mary Crow; but the use of innuendo here, as elsewhere, leaves the reader's responses free. One of the results of Powys's circumlocutory style is that he can encompass several areas of experience at the same time. Where it is absolutely necessary to be particular he can be so; but more often he prefers indirection, so effective in evoking that half-aroused erotic state which seems to be implied, for example, in Wolf Solent's "mythology". The latter resembles the initial dispositions of sexual reverie; and throughout Powys's work we find a preoccupation with that solitary world of sexual fantasy that we find also (but how differently) in the world of Genet. But whereas Genet makes such fantasy the vehicle and subject matter of his fiction, Powys integrates it with the world that challenges and corrects the fantasy, most notably, perhaps in *Maiden Castle*, the most important of all Powys's novels for any consideration of this particular theme. Fantasy is at the root of Dud-No-Man's unsatisfactory relations with Wizzie, as it is of Wolf Solent's with Gerda and Christie: these couples are not matched as are John and Mary Crow. Sylvanus Cobbold's treatment of his young girls is an extension of the same preoccupation. The origins of this concern are described in the *Autobiography* with remarkable candour, even for today;<sup>9</sup> and I suspect that what makes Powys's world, and especially that of *Wolf Solent*, so displeasing to many people is precisely this treatment of sexual immaturity and impotence. But in the facing of these issues in his fiction his readers may well find a

liberation more profound and lasting than that offered by more strenuously "normal" writers.

For Powys faces squarely what Lawrence rejects: the extraordinary reveries to be found in his novels are but an extended sexual awareness. What Lawrence stigmatises under the label of "sex-in-the-head", Powys develops as a positive. However, the two men cannot be contrasted as neatly as that: Lawrence is attacking something different. What he hates, and dismisses so scornfully in his essay on John Galsworthy, is the trivialisation of passion, the cult of it as a surface emotion unrelated to the social and economic factors which support it. It is the separation of sexual experience from the rest of life which he deplors, and he is perceptive enough to make the connection between a society's sexual and physical fastidiousness and its attitude to money and possessions. This aspect of sex, with all its social implications, Powys leaves alone; he is more concerned to subsume sex into a greater experience. By "sex" I mean just that: the actual personal relationships between people enjoying sex (or not) is a different matter.

As always with Powys, it is "sensation" that is the key.

This is where he strikes his special note. The modern preoccupation with orgasm is genitally orientated. Powys, however, is not: he is a cerebralist. But this also means that he describes a far more diffused sensuality than the merely genital. The very ambiguity (a favourite word of his) of so many of the sexual encounters and reveries in his novels enables them to merge with other sensuous experiences, and to merge with their setting—this is especially true of the earlier books between *Ducdame* and *Maiden Castle*. When Sam Dekker has his vision of the Grail, and feels himself pierced from below it is by the spear of the Love of God: Powys leaves the associations at that. And the process is in a sense reversed when, in the same novel, John Geard waits in the haunted chamber in Mark's Court to commune with the spirit of Merlin, and hears first, not the voice of the dead wizard, but the sound of a man and woman making water in a chamber pot. Here again, "the place of excrement" is associated with vision.<sup>10</sup> And this too is part of the burning out of shame.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Cowper Powys: *Letters to Nicholas Ross*, 1971, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Sanders: *D.H. Lawrence: The World of the Major Novels*, New York, 1974, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> This point was made in an address given by Mr. Angus Wilson to the John Cowper Powys Centenary Conference, held at Churchill College, Cambridge, September 8-10, 1972 (printed in *The Powys Review*, 1, Spring 1977).

<sup>4</sup> *In Defence of Sensuality*, 1930, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> See F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 1955, Chapter 7.

<sup>6</sup> G. Wilson Knight, "John Cowper Powys as

Humorist", *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 222, no. 1285, February 1973.

<sup>7</sup> For a searching examination of Lawrence's social attitudes see Scott Sanders, *op. cit.*, also Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Raine, *The Land Unknown*, 1975, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography*, 1934, pp. 32-33.

<sup>10</sup> W. B. Yeats, "Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop".

<sup>11</sup> H.P. Collins, *John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man*, 1966, p. 54.

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# Stephen Allen

## The Real Mynydd-y-Gaer

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Any reader of John Cowper Powys will have noted his use of sites that are full of archaeological and/or mythological import. Obvious examples are Glastonbury, Stonehenge and Maiden Castle. That these sites are thus significant is, I think, incontrovertible, but I would question, however, Powys's notion of and use of Caer Drwyn, which mostly, but not always, is referred to as "Mynydd-y-Gaer".

Mynydd-y-Gaer is, of course, depicted as a Romano-British stronghold in *Porius* and in his 'PREFACE' or *anything you like to PORIUS* Powys states:

Mynydd-y-Gaer or the "Hill of the Camp" with its huge ruins of a prehistoric encircling wall, still overlooks the little town of Corwen.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of Caer Drwyn being a fortress is further indicated in a letter, dated March 9th 1949, to Iorwerth C. Peate, wherein he mentions the final stage in the writing of *Porius*:

I took my final page, i.e. (another "i.e." or idiot's entrance) page 2811 in my long sprawl up to the Gaer here snugly ensconced against the north-east wind = that deepest *stone-craters* in the wall or stone chambers & waited for some sort of Inspiration *in situ* for my last paragraph & I really *did* get it!<sup>2</sup>

In *Owen Glendower* Mynydd-y-Gaer is the final refuge of Owen, the hermit survivor of an unrealised national dream. Prima facie this choice of site seems very apt, since Owen is returning to an aboriginal fortress that predates the English conquest of Wales. Indeed the very place affords him protection from the English:

The danger that any enemy might light upon him in these prolonged trances had been reduced to a minimum by the traditions of the supernatural which surrounded this prehistoric camp.<sup>3</sup>

The supposed continuity of Mynydd-y-Gaer from prehistory is used to great effect by Powys in depicting Broch's "insatiable longing for the calm of the inanimate":

The blaze of their bonfire had created a circle of light and warmth in the midst of a segment of the earth's surface which at that hour seemed to be reverting to what it must have been when the old inhabitants of Mynydd-y-Gaer gazed across it, thousands upon thousands of years ago! Reverting, so it seemed to Broch, in his strange yearning for the impersonal, for the non-human, to the primal supremacy of the grey slate.<sup>4</sup>

It is most interesting to consider the scene in *Maiden Castle* where Uryen Quirm explains to Dud Noman the origin of his name 'Uryen' by appealing to the authority of Sir John Rhys's book, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*:

"He [Rhys] makes it clear that the word 'Uryen' is no Celtic word but far older—a word belonging to the mysterious civilization of the dwellers in Dunium and in the great cities about Avebury and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn and Caer Sidi and Cattræth and Carbonek".<sup>5</sup>

While Avebury and Stonehenge are well known pre-Celtic sites, Rhys reports that Caer Sidi and Cattræth are settings in Taliesin's poems. Carbonek, also mentioned by Rhys, is from Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, it being the castle where Pelles kept the Holy Grail. The insinuation of Caer Drwyn into Rhys's list, however, is quite unjustified, since nowhere in *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, published in 1891, is it mentioned!

Caer Drwyn is elsewhere placed on a par with Stonehenge and Maiden Castle when Uryen explains the nature of the old Bards' Power of the Underworld:

"It's the Power our race adored when they built Avebury and Maiden Castle and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn"<sup>6</sup>

*The History of Merioneth: Volume 1* was published in 1967 by the Merioneth Historical and Record Society based in Dolgellau. In this work E.G. Bowen and C.A. Gresham present a cogent argument against Caer Drwyn being either a significant site or a hill fort at all!

Any visitor to the site will observe that the collapsed drystone wall does not occupy a hill-top site, as do many hill forts in order to utilise any natural defences, but that it lies on the western slopes of a ridge that terminates the high ground north of the River Dee between Llangollen and Corwen. In fact several other sites in the Dee Valley afford much better natural defences.

The authors note that no archaeological finds have been recorded which might have helped with the dating of the site. By implication this suggests that the site was not occupied by humans for any length of time since multifarious artefacts including pottery shards, implements and coins are usually discoverable in any such occupied site. By analogy with other sites the authors suggest that the first of three identifiable forts on the site may be dated to the first century B.C. They continue:

The large stone-built enclosure need not be very much later . . . at least it should belong to the period preceeding the Roman Conquest. There is an old strong folklore tradition which connects Caer Drwyn with cattle and apart from this it is reasonable to

suggest that the builders of the large enclosure were Cattle Lords, not concerned with constructing a hill-top fortress, but with making a safe corral in which to protect their herds against wandering bands of rustlers. This would account for the choice of a site on a long grassy slope, rather than an exposed hill-top, and for the large area enclosed.<sup>7</sup>

Further evidence is cited to support their hypothesis in pointing out the deep grooved trackway which runs down the hillside to the valley. This is no old water course for there is no water supply within the wall but, they argue, it could only have been formed by the feet of many beasts entering and leaving the enclosure.

For all Powys's interest in and the emphasis laid upon Caer Drwyn, the site does not seem to be what he took it to be and certainly not on a par with the pre-Celtic sites mentioned by Rhys. Consequently his use of Caer Drwyn is misguided in that the supposed mythological and/or historical associations suggested in *Owen Glendower* and *Maiden Castle* are nonexistent.

How would Powys react to this? I'm sure he would remain incorrigible and reply along the lines that he did in a letter, dated March 14th 1949, to Iorwerth Peate, when the latter challenged the former's reading of the Porius Stone found near Trawsfynydd. Powys read the inscription as "Homo Christianus" as opposed to "Homo Planus":

But that "*Planus Homo*" business certainly makes no difference to my story my title or my own belief.<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Porius*, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> *John Cowper Powys: Letters 1937-1954*, ed. I.C. Peate, University of Wales, 1974, pp. 79-80.

<sup>3</sup> *Owen Glendower*, 1941, p. 889.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 887.

<sup>5</sup> *Maiden Castle* (1937), 1966, p. 254.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters 1937-1954*, p. 81.

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# Oliver Marlow Wilkinson

## John Cowper Powys in Love

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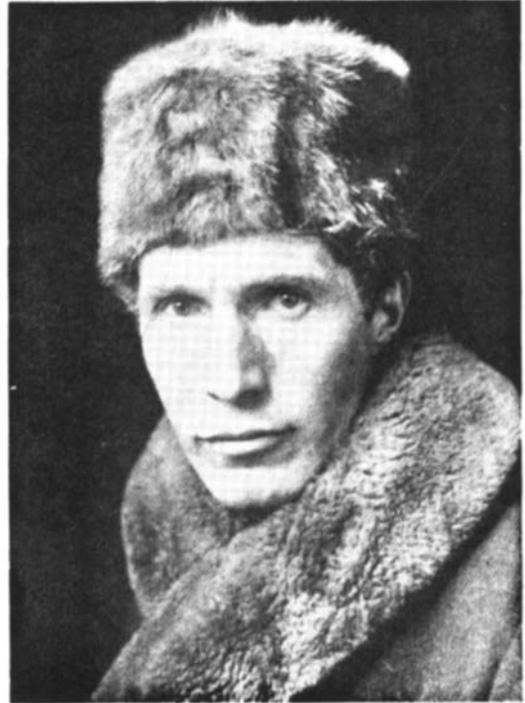
John Cowper Powys long ago wrote about Frances Gregg. She was a nameless figure, an unknown poet, an anonymous heroine, in his writing. In the book of *Literary Devotions, Visions and Revisions*, John Cowper Powys—or Jack as almost all who knew him called him—writes of Walt Whitman's "extraordinary genius for sheer poetry" that no other poet of his own time can equal, ". . . none of them can get the trick of it. None of them!" Then Jack adds, "Somewhere, once, I heard a voice that approached it, a voice murmuring of

*Those that sleep upon the wind,  
And those that lie along the rain,  
Cursing Egypt—"*

That "voice" was Frances Gregg's. She was with the Imagist group of poets in Philadelphia; a beautiful girl with whom Ezra Pound had been in love. Her greatest friend was Hilda Doolittle. "H.D." Frances Gregg and her mother, Julia, were schoolteachers in Philadelphia.

Frances took Ezra Pound and "H.D." to Jack's lectures. After the lectures, Frances would return to the house that was like thousands of others, in the street that was like thousands of others, where she and her mother lived. They not only taught—Frances's mother had started the first school for Italian emigrants in Philadelphia—but spent a good deal of their time rescuing ill-treated children, negroes and other victims. Their house was often a shelter for rescued animals.

Frances and her mother came from American pioneering stock. Family letters dating back to the 1820s, indicate that the women were, on the whole, the stronger characters. They needed to be, for their husbands seem, in several cases, to have died much earlier than their wives. When



the husbands died—from exposure, fever or Indian arrows—the women were left to cross the prairies on their own, in covered waggons. Later some of the women saved the overland fare to the West Coast by sailing round the Horn. When they did this, they seem to have shipped a great deal of their furniture with them. Some of this furniture Frances and her mother transported to England after the First World War, and they heaved that furniture all round the Eastern and Southern counties.

Jack and Frances met early in 1912. Although the following letter from Jack to Frances has a reference within it to 1913, all the evidence suggests that its date, "January 9th 1912" is the correct one.

[Printed heading:]

*The Dorset  
European Hotel  
Absolutely Fireproof  
Central Ave. and Beatty St.*

*Pittsburgh P.A. 1912  
January 9th 1912*

[Drawing of two cigarettes, marked "Richmond straight cut" and "Marquise", crossed, and with the smoke from them crossing above.]

On January 9th. this strange being—it is difficult even for the faithful biographer to call her a girl—sought out and marked down for her prey that unfortunate poet whose writings are read in every Lunatic Asylum and every penitentiary and every House of Ill Fame from Milan to Chicago. It is hardly possible, even now they are both dead, to decide which was really the victim, and which the devourer. The world, at any rate is well rid of them both; and quiet and contented people may thank the just fates, which threw two such enemies of Society into one another's murderous clutches. In estimating their strange martyrdom one may perhaps conclude the frailer of the two the conqueror since while his work is only known by those whose fixed ideas and traditional affectations have set them beyond the pale of our Utopian State, hers has proved the beginning of that wonderful New Style, the poetry without words or metre which has so enthralled us all.

Peace then be to their ashes! They were indeed a Bridge to the Future: and, Sacrificer and Sacrificed, their names can no more be separated now than can their poor wave-tost relics, drowned together beyond recovery and recognition under the tides of the fatal sea that first united them.

From the amazing fragments of their letters to one another the biographer is bewildered by a complete change in tone which seemed to have occurred about the

9th. of January 1913. Until that day her letters seem to have been bitter and savage beyond all description and his in return like the yells of a chained wild-beast. After that date it is his that are merciless and flippant while hers sound like the echoes of the cries of a lost spirit.

This letter is the first in the collection of letters of Frances and Jack. Jack's letters to Frances were in the harbour fortress at Devonport, found there when houses around were smoking ruins; Frances's letters to Jack were given to me, at Phyllis Playter's suggestion, by Jack himself. When Jack published *Visions and Revisions* in 1915, he added, to that quotation from Frances's poetry, "But that voice went its way." He did not realise that this was, still, only the beginning of his relationship with Frances. From their first meeting he was in love with her. In February 1912, he wrote a long poem to Frances which begins,

Out of the depths have I caught thee, O my beloved!

And never again

Though all the curses of all the heavens fall on us,

Drowning us, drowning us, drowning us both together,

Shall thou and I be torn from each other!

Yet, in that very year, 1912, when Jack was increasingly and—as one can see by the letters—frantically, madly, in love with Frances, she married Louis Wilkinson.

Jack himself was already married. What could be better, thought Jack, than to marry Frances off to "his old College pal"—as some Americans called Louis—to his fellow lecturer, Louis Wilkinson?

That, later, Jack found his own reasoning inexplicable, is shown by his letters in 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918 and 1919. In 1913, for instance, he writes,

[The first part of the letter is missing]

Does it give you pleasure to know that at this moment I am experiencing a suffering of a quite damnable kind because you belong to dear little Louis instead of me—Why can't I get your *mouth* out of

my mind? O and the way your chin curves, & the way—worst of all! (I *know* no one shivers at these little things as much as I do—) the Way the Demiurge has managed you—under your chin—and so—downwards!

Ah! Frances—Frances—Louis may have more amorousness for you & more tender affections—Ezra [Pound] may have more concern over your mental creations—James may be the more submissive slave, and Lulu [Llewelyn Powys] the more subtle courtier—but I *know* that of all your lovers Jack, at any rate *now*, when there is no Cathy to break the impact, loves the “me”, the “self”, the inner “will”, the elfish “psyche”, the actual “person” that Frances is (when she says to herself “I am what I am”) most hopelessly and constantly of all—I have been “infatuated” as Louis will remind us before and I have idealized before—But may God swallow me if I have ever been in love before—Sadism is an inspid byplay to this—and I suppress it. How absurd to go on in this vein! I always used to stop and hesitate and be a devil of a time choosing my words when I wrote to you anything but Tiger-talk—but now I could go on telling you about this folly sans stint—hours by the dial. The odd thing, is that whereas formerly I would find all manner of literary analogies w<sup>h</sup> gave me pleasure to read—now nothing is more flat to me than every species of love poetry—The demons don’t seem to be thinking of the same thing at all—

Listen—stop laughing a minute—

Hold your head back—Light your pipe, Louis, you devil, with all the matches in the world—

Hold your head back—

Well! I have kissed you now!—

I love you—

Do you like this letter—or don’t you?

Don’t let me annoy you without knowing.

The letters continue till 1941. Wherever Frances took her family, in France, in many

places of England and Wales, there was a letter from Jack waiting for her. The story of Jack till 1941, the planning of his writing, and all the changes in his fortunes; Frances’s adventures, as she travelled the world with her mother, her son and daughter, from hotel to hovel, from cottage to old Manor, from London houses flaking in plaster to houseboats riding at anchor among the curlews of the Blackwater, to many, many other houses, all this is told in the letters between Frances and Jack.

Jack and Frances loved one another. Yet Frances is no uncritical admirer of John Cowper Powys. Here is an example from one letter.

[On the envelope, post-marked “Littlehampton, 3.p.m. 16 DEC 1935, Sussex”, is typed, “This letter is so tiresome I would not read it if I were you”. But the envelope had been opened.]

. . . I wish that you had never been scolded by anyone in your whole life. You should not have been. There is little sin in you. Unfortunately you irritate people profoundly. You stand there, in the clouded infancy of existence, and we,—little and big, worthless and grand, stupid and intelligent—have been hurried on into this present state of flurried and harrassed adulthood . . .

. . . This prolonged infancy of yours is what annoys those who cherish you most. Children have a peculiar fate. The chief thing that is asked of them is to keep out of the way. When adults have to do with them they tend, if ‘child lovers’ to treat them as though they were charming little animals. Their charm is then disarming and their presence becomes tolerable. But even Jack who so loves himself that he has written seven huge books to record it, would hardly claim that he has any of the disarming gambolling charm of infancy. Now there is no doubt in my mind that the erotic impulse is strongest in extreme youth when it is also sterile. I learned that from you as I learn everything

from you. The erotic impulse is, of all qualities, incompatible with love. You—cosmic child—cannot ‘love’. So, says Frances, love does not—as yet—exist in the universe. But its existence has been apprehended.

. . . How valuable these books of yours have been only I know. But I know too a better thing for you to do.

Some of Frances’s stories—“Whose Dog?”, “The Hunchback”, “The Apartment House”, “The Unknown Face”—are in anthologies. She felt, though, that life, and whatever is given to one’s hand in real life, must be the first concern; she suspected that the artist battens on the corpse of past events. Yet Frances influenced the writing of T.F. Powys, was one of the very first to help him, and to type his manuscripts: she influenced Jack’s work; and the work of her husband, Louis Wilkinson, who wrote sometimes under his own name and sometimes as ‘Louis Marlow’. Frances is a *part* of several women in Jack’s novels; sometimes the greater part, but never, I think, completely recognisable. Frances appears in Jack’s *Autobiography*: she is the boy-girl who is arrested in Venice for wearing man’s clothes. I remember Frances’s indignation at not being identified further, not even as Louis Wilkinson’s wife: but—as Jack had written to Frances—he had resolved to write his *Autobiography* without mention of women (which would, he added, cause consternation to his publishers). Well, here in these letters is Jack’s attitude to one woman; and his attitude to many women.

Frances was a Christian, a very unorthodox one but of the kind that may foreshadow the future of the Church—if the Church continues in any shape. Jack was a worshipper of many gods. In Chapter 11 of *The Mystic Leeway* (unpublished) that Jack persuaded and cajoled Frances to write, she states that she abhors her own sex but that the hope of a sane world is in women as it is in Jews.

Just as Jesus presents a duality, a male-female psychology, so the Jews are,

of all peoples the most feminine, and have the virtues and vices of the female. Like women they combine a strong sense of the mystery of life, with a practical, materialistic, realistic way of dealing with existence. A woman, when her ideas of God interfere with her immediate desires, makes sure first of her material needs and without hypocrisy, nor even discomfort, praises, lauds, and regards with fervent reverence a God whom she has safely esconced in a very distant heaven. So with the Jews.

. . . Christianity is not a religion. It is a social system evolved from the actual facts of existence informed by the actual faith of non-existence. It is the marriage of the truth of man and woman. Here, in our times another Jew has risen up to repeat the simple formula. Epstein has given us an Adam, stripped of every Greek folly of physical beauty, a feminine concept of Adam, a fact, a truth; a man concept of Adam, exquisitely informed with the spirit, searching vast space for God, alive, virile, accepting existence, revelling in it, but having faith in the thing that does not exist.

At this point in time, we find, not one nation as hitherto toppling to ruin, but the whole world. The vicious materialism of woman, the foul hypocrisy of man, have done their work. The whole structure of the world is convulsed by mania, rushing headlong to its doom—yet it will not fall. But from whence will come its succour?

. . . Where then, except from a people without a nation, from the Jew. Think of them, scattered all over the earth, retaining their racial characteristics uncontaminated, having that profound feminine integrity that has preserved the simplicity and decency of their domestic relationships, the purity of marriage and the sacredness of children: having the magnificent masculine integrity that has preserved their tribal God through all the ages.

. . . It could be, it must be, for from nowhere else is there any hope.

And Jack answers (this is in 1941),

Well! well! I am *very well pleased* with  
this passionate speech on the

*Jews*

Tis is about the 1st time I find myself  
in

*Entire & Complete  
accord*

with your wild ideas. I swear you're  
right about this & I like this new develop-  
ment of your thoughts & of their form of  
expression—

Now don't go and "swear in your  
wrath" or declare by God in your pride  
that you have *never changed since you  
were a little girl* but have always had the  
same ideas—i.e. *the only truth*—and  
the same form and mode and arrange-  
ment of them . . . & that it is Ezra and  
Frank Shelley and James & Andrew and  
John *who have grown up . . .* or become  
"as little children" again —growing  
backwards—to be able to understand the  
Message "Once for all delivered" to Lit-  
tle Fanny . . . I say *don't* "swear in your  
wrath" (and pride) that life *has* not,  
*could* not, and *must* not *dare* to *claim*, to  
have taught you anything! or that your  
ideas *are in any way* the result of getting  
wiser & more mellow with time! For I  
contend that this is a very deep, true &  
*striking* essay on the Jews & their relation  
to Jesus—

\*\*\*

"Of course *you* say so (you silly old  
Sandymount-Jack) because, as you've  
just confessed, you agree for the 1st. time  
with my ideas . . . *therefore* (O old nin-  
compoop!) you think they're *wonderful*,  
and indeed a *great* improvement on all  
the earlier ones!"

\*\*\*

Well I can't help it but I do find this  
essay of extraordinary interest & sear-  
chingness and explorations blind and

true, in those psychic Saragossa seas  
where the mystic *eels of God* breed and  
spawn and start "round the world forever  
& aye!" Yes I can follow & understand  
this heavenly mole-run into the Jewish  
sub-soil for haven't I always told Louis  
and everybody (& fairly started the  
hare!) that I have a few distaff-drops of  
Jewish blood & haven't I been *kept* as  
lecturer, writer, and as a *private reader*  
in my own rabbinical study!—*kept by the  
Jews* ever since I left England in 1905 or  
*thereabouts* for Philadelphia before you  
were in long frocks! Isn't the one only  
single work of art on the stage *the only  
one*—(with all my enormous experience  
no! no!)—that I have been absolutely  
carried away by—"the Dibbuk" or the  
"Possessed" (not Dostoievsky's  
"Possessed" at all!) performed by the

*Moscow Yiddish Players  
in Hebrew—*

<sup>u</sup>I saw in New York once & have never  
forgotten it.

It nearly made me rush past the or-  
chestra & on the stage & cry

take me!

take me!

take me!

I too am a Jew!

[Drawing of Jack with Jewish long hair  
and beard, dashing onto the stage with a  
stick and lighted candle, while the con-  
ductor tries to grab his leg.]

Yes yes yes & what—oh what —oh *all  
what*—you say of Jews & women I  
follow—agree with . . . and give myself  
up to—in the flowing inspiration & great  
*bulge* in the belying Veil of the Holy  
Temple! Of your new style of thought  
that shows *such great development* . . .

(damn your proud wrath!)

for I am *deep down below*, below where I  
get my old *dyspepsia*

[Drawing of a stomach, a devil in it  
with a double pointed spear.]

Jack's pit of the stomach with Dispep-  
sia.

[Drawing of a lower stomach with a star in it.]

The star of David  
able to *Be* both Feminine & Jewish!  
*So I glory in this Essay!*

Yes I am decidedly impressed and delighted with this *Chapter 11*.

You are the most surprising *brain* I have ever met. Of course you know that I don't follow you in your hatred of St. Paul though I do follow you in your hatred of St. Paul's *influence* both on Protestants & Catholics . . .

. . . I can't tell you what help for my secretest life I get out of Paul's writings .

The letters between Frances and Jack are essential for any future biography of John Cowper Powys. To us all, though, these letters tell in the best possible, unpremeditated and spontaneous way, with no eye on posterity at all, the story of (as Jack writes) these "two enemies of Society" that "the just fates . . . threw . . . into one another's murderous clutches!" They tell a love story, in fact.

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# John Cowper Powys in America to T. F. Powys: Letters 1923—1929

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[1923]

March 17

Theodore my dear,

I congratulate from my heart on the publication of this book.\* It was *Chatto & Windus* who published that old edition of *Rabelais*.

God! I *am* pleased—As Mr Bennet said when L.C.P. told him he had bought the Prep—“this is the best news I have heard from you!” How thrilling it’ll be for me when I actually hold in my hand a copy of your book—and read it—Christ! & by my soul I’ll *lecture* on it too!

I have twice down here in Southern California come upon the “Soliloquy”. Lulu’s Jew-publisher has agreed to re-publish my *Suspended Judgments* for wh<sup>h</sup> I shall get *ten per cent* a copy at the retail price—Bertie says you get 8 pence a copy of yours.

God! my dear I am pleased to hear this—May the 8 pence-cies mount up heavily & fast! Thank the Lord!

It’ll give you an immense push & impulse to write more—and you’ve got how much is it? 2 years before you are 50 like brother John the evil one.

I will send you my little psychoanalytical book soon. You’ll like the cover from a Greek Vase. I get terrible letters of desperate appeals for more money from Burpham—I can’t think how I manage to have any happy moments at all with such debts—up to £100—accumulating there and tradesmen not paid.

But really its getting so far beyond me—the whole situation—that I just go on from day to day living in the present and putting it out of my mind. I have not the least intention of shooting myself as some financial failures seem to do so quickly! If

you have no heavy tradesmen’s *debts*, that is *something*, Theodore, even though you don’t have as much Olive Oil as I do!

I walked over this mountainous “Park” last night coming back from a lecture at Santa Barbara.

Like an old fox I followed trails I knew—and tried when it got dark to get into Hollywood without passing any of the houses in the outskirts that keep *large* dogs! I heard one deep bay that sent my heart as they say into my boots but I sneaked along past clutching my rose-wood stick.

Since everybody here goes in a motor even the working people, these dogs take all walkers for tramps & bandits & just rush straight at ’em.

I have got a very heavy hickory stick that I usually take. I have lately wasted my last three free week-ends in writing a long explanatory critical essay on James Joyce’s “*Ulysses*” this forbidden book that costs \$50—

But by the lord it *would* interest you to hold it in your hands. No doubt you have heard tell of it.

It is rather in the style of Dean Swift—and also of Petronius Arbiter—and also of Sterne—It is a masterpiece of 800 quarto pages—but 200 of these are too obscure for me to make out a word of—But the rest of it is not obscure at all! Its more *unhappy* & savage—than what you might call bawdy—but it does say things that no one has ever dated to *print* before! but just ordinary little human thoughts all the same!

It is printed in France—and published now by the “Egoist” Press in London.

I hope my wife won’t suffer terribly from these debts etc. etc. & that my son won’t have his last two terms spoilt by humiliation and not being able to treat his friends to drinks. But there it is! I am at the end of my tether over it—and if I just go on from day

\* *The Left Leg*

to day & pour olive oil over my fried potato & spinach they must endure it as well as they can! There do come moments in one's life that one gets kind of callous—when anxieties cancel themselves by piling too high!

I wonder what reviews your book will have! I am simply longing to hold it in my hands. Heaven protect you—J.

[1923]

4 Patchin Place

June 10

I must hurry to tell you how very highly I think of *The Left Leg* . . . curse it but I've been hors-de-combat in my *Right Leg* . . . like any Farmer Mew. But I am much better tho' still stiff and lame a bit & can't walk more than a little way . . . it must have been somehow poisoned or made bad by a blow—the knee is a ticklish thing whether you bend it in prayer or not! and I don't feel yet my familiar arrogant stride . . .

Well Theodore I can't tell you in a letter briefly written all the things I feel with regard to this book. It is well & deeply worthy of you . . . *The Left Leg* is the most original & metaphysical *Hester Dominy* is the most touching & poignant & exciting to read . . . And *Abraham Men* is the best as a work of art . . . certainly it is the one with fewest extravagances . . . and it ends the happiest. And in it lust isn't so fiercely pilloried or flattened out but treated tolerantly & whimsically. I think the relations—if you can call them relations—between George Pring and Rose are extraordinarily natural and well-described. In fact no one has ever before just hit that kind of rustic "taking things for granted" so! I like that little incident of "Be you a maiden?" and the light way she runs off telling him that "mother" has some news for him . . . and the way they go off quite harmlessly together after Luke Bird has interrupted a somewhat crucial struggle . . . The manner in which Luke is flabbergasted & non-plussed by those

cautious non-committal answers about dogs & horses and maidens and hundred pounds and I think that figure of Winnie "with her soft hair" is exquisitely brought in . . . "he was reminded of Winnie" . . . and one feels so sympathetic to those bare feet in the passage when the door was locked! and so glad when at the end it isn't locked any more . . . but the ring at the end . . . these rings . . . I . . . am . . . sure . . . I . . . don't . . . know! . . . But how sad I felt for Farmer Hart . . . he was a very well done character . . . very good . . . one of the best . . . & those scenes in the pound . . . first rate. *Mat-terface* what a name! Indeed all your names are wonderfully chosen . . . couldn't be better! I can remember looking with you at "Dominy" over a shop between the clock & the station. That mother in Hester & the bells and the way the children *go off* . . . is really genius, my third brother! Now and then . . . but perhaps not in Ridgeway St . . . there is too much repetition . . . its the one of my two criticisms . . . of the "clue-remark" of the particular character . . . like the shepherd to his dog . . . and my 2nd criticism is with regard to what I call the *extravagant fantasy* of certain incidents . . . like the trampling to death of the old woman of the bank . . . and . . . perhaps . . . the driving of the sheep but I feel less sure of that . . . but I seem to recall faintly other cases that I cannot name just now . . . but this second stricture isn't half as serious . . . at least so I feel . . . as the first. But neither spoil for me the extraordinary & original beauty of it all & the humour which is entirely different from any that has ever been . . . the nearest to it Lawrence Sterne I fancy . . . but far off even that . . . & I like yours better, to confess the truth—as a rule. Lulu said he was struck & startled & impressed by the masterly and assured firmness & technical assurance of the style . . . like no amateur . . . like an experienced & practised craftsman at the game!

I think the idiot boy is splendid . . . ah! I remember . . . another instance of, perhaps, a bit too much repetition of the same note . . . naughty Nolly's little ways! But your plump lady of Love's Cottage Mrs.

Cuddy is one of the best in the book . . . & those old rascals calling on her & getting nervous . . . except the crafty carpenter . . . are beyond praise . . . just as the boastings of that other old chap about taking the wench to cuddle in the loft when he never dared to lift finger to her . . . are natural & passing true to those things. But I think *Rose* is a splendid girl . . . I think her character is amazingly vivid and real and with such few touches . . . I think the whole of *Abraham Men* every word of it is beautiful . . . I haven't one single criticism for *that* story . . . no repetitions in it & no too extravagant happenings . . . it is a perfect story in your style. Those talks in the shop are almost as good as the talks in the Pound . . . Oh yes . . . perhaps its an "extravagant happening" in the *Left Leg* when the idiot puts the bees under Mrs. Summerbee's dress to get her garter! I don't like such goings on . . . but there are some wonderful passages all the way through . . . perhaps the deepest & most curious ones in the *Left Leg* . . .

I think . . . and so did Lulu . . . that its lovely the way Jar carries off the poor Mary in that cart . . . and how it just ends with her mind being healed by what they meet on the road . . . The encounter between Jar and Mew is like the encounter in Wasserman's "World Illusion" between Christian & the Murderer . . . but in *that* case the good one converts the other . . . but your farmer is of tougher stuff . . .

I am perhaps a little startled by the behaviour of Mr Mew . . . so unpretty are his proceedings . . .

God! when one thinks what a sadistic element there is in the writings of Theodore

and  
Lulu  
and  
John

it does suggest curious funny inheritances and I ask . . . *from which?* from the old man? . . . or from her-your mother? But *Abraham Men* keeps all that element more quietly in its place . . . less standing out . . .

more earthified & mingled with less abnormal instincts . . . I think *Abraham Men* is very very good . . . though it has not the deep mysticism of the *Left Leg* or the pathos and tragedy of poor Hester . . . I long to see the book reviewed over here . . . The reviewers are now quarrelling whether Lulu or John is the best writer . . . I long for the moment when Theodore enters the arena as another competitor. There was indeed already one article that talked of all three of us together in the "Nation" . . . but the chap was rather unsympathetic to Lulu so the article was not a well balanced one, playing us off one against the other, as some of them have done. But there *will* be such, directly Knopf's edition is out . . . till then *no one* must review the book because it w<sup>d</sup> annoy Knopf if people wrote to England for the original.

As to my affairs of a financial kind I will not speak of them—they are sad and difficult—but L.C.P. cabled to me that he was going to take matters in hand—which is an enormous relief to me . . . I suppose he will supply M & L out of what will be due to me when Father cannot look out of the window any more. But I really do not know what he will do. I only have that reassuring cable. It was very good of him to send it. Now I turn to your darling little Violet, Theodore, and forget my troubles by kissing her as Luke Bird would have liked to have kissed Rose when he first spoke of God to George at tea! But I know well that Violet is a more good girl than Rose—and I am no Squire Kennard. Well give her my love anyway & to yourself with many congratulations.

Yr  
J

[1927]

*Permanent address still 4 Patchin Place*

Les Vegas  
New Mexico

July 24

My dear Theodore

Outside my window I hear one man say to another . . . "why don't yer sit down here.

*She ain't home!*"

Here is an American School Edition of King Lear w<sup>h</sup> I've been lecturing on—& I read in it the following—

M. William Shak.-speare His true Historie of the life & death of King Lear & his three daughters with the unfortunate life of Edgar sonne & heire to the Earl of Gloster and his sullen & assumed humour of Tom of Bedlam as it was played at Whitehall upon St Stephen's night in Christmas Hollidayes. Printed for Nathaniel Butter & to be sold at his shop at the signe of the Pide Bull.

I also read in the notes the following—"In the Bell-man of London by Dekker there is an account of one of these characters under the title of Abraham Man . . . Of these Abraham men some be exceeding merry—others are dogged and so sullen both in looke and speech that spying a small company in a house they boldly & bluntly enter *compelling* the servants thro' fear to give them what they demand"—

I am staying in lodgings at the house of Bavarian Jews but I have to go to the Railway Station to get my meals and sit up at a counter on a revolving seat.

The Dogs here are of enormous size and incredible numbers but tend more to pursue motors than walkers for w<sup>h</sup> I bless my stars every day I go out for the look of them is startling. There is a man who lives sixty miles from here called Warwick Gurney Powys—from rumours I hear of his boastfulness I am sure we must be relations; but I shall never see him, though he gave a volume of old Punches (about the time of the Zulu war) to a person in this town. There are other stories about him rather to be heard than reported.

The most sinister tales however current this way are not about Mr Powys but about Mexican human sacrifices which they say take place on Good Friday on the top of a mountain called Hermits Peak, at w<sup>h</sup> I glance now & then, as I try to skirt the town on the way to the Station; but you will be eased in your mind when you learn that they are young men of 30 who are thus sacrificed and that it enobles their relations & makes

them sacro-sanct for all time. The young men are said to be glad to perish at the age of Our Lord—but they lose this glory if they act lewdly so much as one single time.

I am greatly in fear of the Cow-boys who the day before I arrived occupied the town and "shot up" a café; the marks of which riotous event & its memory are held in great & high esteem by the Proprietors. The head-man at the Station Lunch-Counter however comes from Dorchester w<sup>h</sup> he left when he was 25. He says he knew Max Gate *very well*; & was a friend of Harry Pouncey who used to be invited to entertain the Dorset Club in London by performances in Dialect. His name is Haywood & he has an aged uncle here who also came from Dorchester forty years ago and is one of the founders of this town.

In a remote little farm over the desert, where I walk, there is a duck that I sometimes at evening can hear quacking—& across these desert plains with horses & cattle & Mexicans in their big hats the sound of the duck's quacking seems *impossible*. I keep walking little distances in various directions but I am nervous of getting far from the town for I know nothing of these Mexicans. When I was lecturing on King Lear the lights went out & everyone had to descend two flights of stairs by lighted matches & I had to give one old lady a drink of my bottle of Spirits of Ammonia w<sup>h</sup> I get now that my flask has come to an end.

The great difficulty is to find subjects that anyone has heard of. There are few books out here. I buy an egg sandwich for my lunch so as not to go to the Station more than twice a day and also a pint bottle of milk,—but I have stopped doing that last—for the thunder turns it sour before I have drunk it. There are thunder storms here almost every day & the air is cool.

They tell me there are two dead Coyotes hanging on a wire fence on a hill near here; but the only dead object I have seen so far is the skeleton of an ox white as milk—a fine thin skull lying in the aromatic plants where I go of an evening. A large dog saw me standing in *that* direction & made *me* move on.

Perhaps he thought I was a cattle-thief—but another time I got both my feet in a round wire hoop & fell headlong close to that ox's skeleton—but luckily no dog was near. It is a strange place. There is a very old French monastery built by Spanish Jesuits years ago and in the old parts of the town the old women wear black Spanish shawls with long tassels.

No one seems inclined to tell me any news of how your books are getting on. I have heard nothing of Mr. Weston nor seen any notice. I hope both you & Violet are all right & that you hear good news of Dick—& are often visited by Francis. I know not what cat you've got now—either of those two kittens w<sup>h</sup> I saw a year ago?

Love & kiss to Violet

Yr  
J.

[1928]

#### THE KEENAN HOTEL SYSTEM MILWAUKEE, WIS.

Feb 28.

I read aloud every word of Mr Weston's *Good Wine* my dear with extraordinary satisfaction. In my choice I put it with *Mockery Gap* and *The Left Leg* as my three favourite ones of your works. What a peculiar and never-before projected humour springs up out of the earth when I read these books of yours! When Mr Vosper and Mr Grunter and Mr Bunce and the dealer and the squire talk together in that tavern under those two pictures and when the clock stops and Mr Weston comes in that is what pleases me and what I call imagination. I only wish you'd mentioned at the end that Mr. Vosper learnt from tasting the good wine to load a cart of hay—but so no doubt he did tho' you forgot to refer to it. Seeing that grave opened certainly had its effect on those farmers' sons and Mrs Vosper died as those people don't always die; but Mr Weston usually delays his appearance except now and then! But Luke Bird is a good character. I am glad you brought him into this book again for I

have always thought him one of your best inventions and how glad I was when Mr Grobie was given the dark wine to drink and what a good touch it is that Mr Weston himself looks forward to drinking that particular wine! I don't so much like the wife of Mr Grobie and her geese but no one can like everything in a book like this. There are passages that are *perfect* though. When those old women talk at their doorways and when Mr Grunter talks; "Everyone likes his own" or something like that; it was about the lost *boot*; and when Mr. Grunter says "Where life bides death is not; and where death bides life is not."

I think the whole book is more under control than some of your other works more at a distance from your actual sufferings and miseries and more mellow. In fact it has not got so much of the kind of thing in it that has a tendency to excite my own particular wickedness!—nor has it so much of that terrible hopeless ghastly feeling (like Nietzsche's "loathing!") which you have put into some of your sadder books when your own nerves had been outraged beyond enduring. Some people might say that you had removed yourself back from this world of your creation—back further and further—so that the things & people are seen through an atmosphere of *distance* where terrible things have a little lost their bite & sting—and that while this book is better "art" it is not so realistic in its grasp of nature—but I do not say this; because your sense of the things that are horrible become so often in the other books almost too much to bear whereas here they are softened a little and toned down by this distance to wh. I refer. Everything is more mellow & treated with a sort of maturity of lightness letting down the reader—& the sinner too, God bless me! more easily than heretofore. It is a difference that I have found elsewhere and, not to flatter you, my dear, have found in very formidable quarters—such, for example; for let me go to the highest wits of all, in "The Brothers Karamazov" and in "The Winter's Tale".

It is extraordinary how you give the feeling of nature and of country life by a

hundred very small delicate touches (I don't know how!) so that there falls on a person that sense of having lived in these places for years. Lulu liked so much (& indeed so did I) the Dorchester tradesmen looking out between the hung-up trowsers & saying "*There's the town-hall . . . there's the church . . . but where are the girls?*"

But I liked (so very especially well) that discourse upon twilight and then the fall of night how everything looks different and is different when the candles are lit. The book is certainly more under control more artful more rounded off and polished up and moulded into shape than anything you've ever done & I refuse to allow that it is inferior to any of them just because there's that "smoothness & temperance" in it which Hamlet praises so highly. God! my dear how all these other English writers—your friends—have been influenced by your peculiar manner! On all sides it can be detected. But here in this book is the "thing itself" what no one but T.F.P. can do! It is a mystery how you project this strange world of humour and mystery out of the recesses of your mind. It goes to prove what I always maintained that there's no such thing as outward fixed-up unchangeable Reality. All comes from individual minds!—Individual minds together create the world for us—and every individual genius has the power to change this combined world into quite a different one: and then bewitch us into it! Well, my dear, I do hope this book will bring you in not only glory but money. And I beg you not to consider the "cycle" closed. Why! Now that you have used your art to push back a little the bitterness of so many things & so much of your secret sufferings a whole world of mellow humorous creations of queer characters talking to each other with this country background emerges as a potentiality. I swear your vein is inexhaustible and all the more so now that you have drawn backwards a little from those things that hurt you so to contemplate. Those ghastly things treated with a certain detachment from the unspeakable loathing which they rouse can fall into so

distant a perspective that they hinder not your concentrating on the vast amused quarries of humorous invention and delicate description wh. you have stored up under your knotted skull! Do let me hear from you that some of the hours of your days are used to go on satisfying this craving for a certain kind of imaginative world that you alone can supply and which your books excite so that it is so sad when the words "the end" are written.

I have just escaped from one hotel here into a smaller one. The one I fled from was like a palatial Bastille. It was terrifying. But this one is only 50 cents cheaper. I have been for a walk by the factories and warehouses of this half-German town famous in former days for its beer. But under the vaunted prosperity of America now there is much terrible unemployment. I saw about twenty men hanging around a place of employment and they were (I believe & fear) all wretchedly underfed & wanting a good meal. If they still were allowed to make beer these men would no doubt be employed. Only one of them had the courage to ask me for anything and I gave him "a quarter" & it was sad to see how pleased he was with so small a sum. I stood for some time wondering if any other would approach but none dared and I had not the saintliness to dare to go right into the group and treat them all to a meal in a restaurant that was near. I wonder what Mr Grobe would have done. I suppose changed three dollars into twelve "quarters" and distributed these but even then some would have been left out. What a description Sterne gives of the behaviour of the beggars in France! I wonder if he would now go back there with twenty quarters in his pocket!

I've just come here (through Chicago) from a town called Peoria where instead of walking among factories I walked among the grand houses of the rich merchants. And, my dear, I was more hunted by a dog than I've ever been. It was an enormous dog as big as a Newfoundland and it took me for a tramp and barked furiously at my heels for about a quarter of a mile while I walked away trying (like the Chinese) not to "lose

my face" & neither running away or showing fight for I *had* a heavy stick. Thus did your father "walk" away from the swan at Pitt Pond. In the end after some three minutes of misery I bolted in front of a motor-car and escaped my pursuer who went home puffed up with righteousness & pride. "A dog's obeyed in office." Bernie used to say that Goethe wd. mutter in his study whenever he heard a dog barking: "Ha! Thou *vile Larva* thou shalt never have me!" Well, my dear, I must stop. My own book\* is not yet finished being typed & revised—Heaven alone knows if it will find a publisher. It is so very long. It is a thousand pages long. It rambles and digresses and rambles and digresses. It will take the publishers a long time even to read it before they decide. I expect there may be delay.

Tonight I have to lecture upon Confucius and Lao-Tze and *Kwang-Tze* who is my favourite of all philosophers. I have got all these huge books out of the Library here—Well we'll see what comes of it! Give my dear sister Violet the kiss of one who hunts and catches! With all luck on your head my dear,

yr J.

[1929]

4 Patchin Place  
May 21st

Theodore my dear

Just a line to tell you & Violet that I hope to be allowed by Providence to cross your well-known threshold sometime about June 19th.

Aye! it will be a happy day for me when that happens. I ought to be in Folkestone about June 8th and in London about June 17th but of course its not settled exactly *to the day!* But do 'ee send me a line to

6 Copthall Gardens  
Folkestone  
Kent

about June 8th.

\* *Wolf Solent*

I am a tiny bit teased by Dyspepsia at the moment owing to overwork & now I find (wh. is really rather teasing for me) that I shall have a holiday task. In fact for the 1st couple of months it looks as if I'll have to work all the mornings . . . which is what Mr Phelps would call a bore and what Mr Childs would call the Devil and what Louis Wilkinson wd. call a f—g b—g b—of a fool's—f—bad arrangement. Its a book I've contracted to write for a publisher called Norton here on the Meaning of Culture and I was so thrilled when he paid me a year ago 300 dollars advance Royalty for it \$200 of which I paid at once to my Dentist for doing *all* my teeth & then when he'd done the upper ones I got so worried by the plate he put in the lower ones that I gave it back to him and got a receipt that he'd finish it later for that \$200 and I've been scared ever since of going back to him! But now I find I've only *half* finished Norton's book which is to be 275 pages and he's already brought out for his travelling salesman what they called the *Dummy* announcing it in October. So I *must* work at it—in England—just like those holiday tasks we used to have for Blake—learning by heart I remember once the whole of the *Deserted Village*.

But you know how I'd want to ramble about Folkestone in the mornings freely and now I shall have so many hours a day to work—& at Chydyock and Beth Car and the White Nore too and also at Lee Farm near Burpham. It'll only be in London that it will be impossible, I think—or so *now* it seems . . . but it will be a task. I never yet have tried to write on a ship & I shan't do that. I really must leave *that* amount of complete holiday; like Father walking to Bagnell instead of visiting in the Borough.

My book's had wonderful Reviews but so did in its day Wood & Stone which the Bishop of New York liked so well that he asked Arnold if I wd. accept an invitation but Arnold said no—so, tho' it surely must have *some* effect to get good Reviews, it by no means follows (as you know I dare say only too well) that the Public at once enters the book-shops to buy it. Five dollars!

When have I ever bought a new novel for five dollars. But Mr. Schuster is a grand one for advertising and in *that* direction there's always a chance over here; though the only *certain* advertisement I suppose would be if I dressed up and walked up 5th Ave with a board on my back saying "Buy Wolf Solent . . . this is how he walks". Apparently Cape is not going to bring it out in England till about July as far as I can gather.

I have been buying your books and now on the new shelves in this room I believe there are all of them. There is a shop wh. keeps them all near here and the early ones can be got now for 75 cents and several times I've expended those 75 cents as they are the rarer ones and the nicer ones I think. My own early ones, such as they are, too are out of print and can be bought at this same shop as yours. I have bought some of them also and have now got, with some difficulty, practically all our works and Lulu's too only his stay more steadily at the price they were published at instead of going up & down at the caprice of the bookseller as yours & mine appear to do. Why this is I don't know. Aye, but all this sounds like the chatter of two old wainscot-rats who've managed to drag down their holes certain choice shreds of cheese-rind or sausage-skins!

That great famous old criminal Lawyer, Mr Darrow (who had that row with Lulu: but that has passed over now) turned up the other night after dining to his heart's delight at the Hotel Lafayette where once Bertie treated Patchin Place's inhabitants so well and I *beat him at chess*—(without his queen) & I hoped he was going to praise my book but he had tried to read it but couldnt and all he did was to spend the whole evening reading aloud from your writings for which he has a passionate love. He read the whole of the short story "The House with the Echo" and passages from

"Mr W's Good Wine" and not only read them but discoursed on them with the particular turn of mind wh. has got off so many from the Electric chair & the Hangman.

The only revenge I practised on this formidable great man for his preference for the Second Powys Brother Writer over the Eldest and Youngest was not to offer him any of my "boot-legged" whiskey (but I have to keep it: I have! I have!) and for *that* miserliness I was well scolded by the other inhabitants of Number 4. He likes my lectures—though—I must console myself with that. And Mr Schuster prints his proclamation in this way; wh. did rather tickle my fancy. "Clarence Darrow says that John C.P. is the best lecturer he has heard then comes a very small " and after those little inverted commas (only to be observed with spectacles) it goes on, in *Mr. Schuster's own words*, that Mr. John is as good at writing as he is at speaking!

When (with considerable pressure) in this room I did with due and proper indirectness finally get *my* book on this great old bugger of a Cicero's lap all he would do was blunderingly to hunt about for Jason who he said was the best character in the book. Dreiser too I owe a lot to for his name but he has only recently begun to get acquainted with T.F.P.—but its begun! its begun!

Give a kiss from Violet to me—aye! What am I saying—I mean from me to Violet and beg her, beg her, beg her, to be nice to me & put up with all my peculiarities when I see her for I have always got a thrill from catching her & that ought—aye? to override *all* faults. Well good luck to you Theodore we shall be meeting soon always yr brother

John

P.S. There's a teasing and worrying misprint at the end of my book—the *patent* shine of a snail instead of the *patient* shine!

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## Reviews

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*A Bibliography of the Writings of John Cowper Powys: 1872—1963*, DANTE THOMAS.

Paul P. Appel, Mamaroneck, N.Y., 1975, \$25.00.

In his Introduction, Dante Thomas quotes from Derek Langridge's Introduction to *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement*, 1966.

For a major writer no single bibliography can serve all purposes equally well. In this volume I have tried to show the development of Powys's work as well as the response to it. As the paraphernalia of full bibliographical description would only obscure the pattern of this arrangement I have left the definitive record of first editions for another time (and perhaps another compiler).

Dante Thomas's *Bibliography*, he claims, provides that "definitive record of first editions". Therefore it may be welcomed as a supplement to a part of Derek Langridge's work.

Derek Langridge's book is a very attractive and readable checklist of books by and about Powys. His arrangement of yearly lists, with Powys's works on all left-hand pages, faced by right-hand page lists of reprints, reviews, and all other forms of literary notices and criticism demonstrative of Powys's reputation, provides fast and easy information for the literary scholar and critic. Dante Thomas is obliged, in providing a mass of information about each entry, to follow a more orthodox arrangement with separate, consecutive sections. He supplies descriptive catalogues of Powys's writings under headings of "Original works", "Books with Contributions", and "Periodical Contributions". His *Bibliography*, while not adding titles of first editions to Derek Langridge's list, provides information not only for scholars and critics but for book-buyers.

Professor Thomas has provided fairly usable descriptions of the first editions of

Powys's books. His descriptive method appears to be very roughly based on that adopted by the American Library Association; a more faithful following of currently accepted methods would have provided us with more accurate descriptions in parts, for example of titles. Despite the curiosity that measurement in unstated units takes the place of format, his descriptions of collations work when the material is simple, such as the *one* impression of the first English edition of *Weymouth Sands*; however, they appear inadequate when more problematic material is looked at. For example, the four impressions, July to September 1933, of the English *A Glastonbury Romance* have not been set in order by analysis; thus one cannot actually discover which is the first. One is left floundering between two alternative descriptions of gatherings and signatures; and moreover, from my own copy of one of these 1933 impressions of *A Glastonbury Romance*, I discover that there is, it appears, a mistake in Dante Thomas's collation of formula (for [1\*]<sup>12</sup> read 1\*<sup>12</sup>). The correct identification of the first impression may be important, especially for this book, as it appears from examination of my copy that there are regular resettings of the head-lines—and it is an explanation of what such things as this may imply in relation to the purity of Powys's text that one might like to have seen. The presentation of Dante Thomas's descriptions could easily have been more "streamlined"; for example it is odd that information about signatures is duplicated, while there are no descriptions of paper. Certainly the work would have been improved for the reader by a preliminary *apparatus criticus* instead of, or in addition to, the enthusiastic Introduction, which is largely an account of Powys's reputation. When we leave the *Bibliography's* first section, on "Original Works", we discover (without announcement) that collations and bibliographical contents have been

abbreviated. (The descriptions of literary contents are never fully detailed throughout this book.)

The main Bibliography is extended by a section of "Selected Titles about J. C. Powys and his Work" (mainly devoted to critical studies), and a section entitled "Letters and Ephemera". The Ephemera include the Little Blue Books (which might, instead, have been referred to in the main Bibliography), a letter describing the formation of the Powys Society (why is this among the books?), and Louis Wilkinson's *Bumbore* and *Blasphemy and Religion*. Appendices follow. To these Louis Wilkinson's *The Buffoon* is relegated (not Ephemeral apparently), whereas his *Swan's Milk*, giving another portrait of Powys, goes into "Selected Titles". Here, in the Appendices, we are told also of a typescript of a play by Powys and Reginald Pole based on Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*; and an extravagantly admiring account of Powys when he lived at "Phudd Bottom", New York, is reprinted entire from a local newspaper, with its headings (which would have made Louis Wilkinson smile) such as TENANTS THE GREATER COSMOS and WOOS EARTH AS A PANACEA.

These last sections are valuable in that they bring elements of Derek Langridge's lists up to date for the period 1972—1976. The titles of secondary works are, however, certainly "Selected". Selection, perhaps inevitably, has some unfortunate results. Some excellent critical articles are omitted, for example from *The Anglo-Welsh Review* (a periodical also ignored by Langridge), apparently because they are not separate leaflets; *A Review of English Literature*, January 1963, with seven valuable articles on J. C. Powys, is also omitted (though it appears in the list of "Periodical Contributions" for its publication of the poem, "The Ridge"). And yet, mimeographed or xeroxed papers read to the Powys Society, and also lesser pamphlets, have been described, and moreover, with quotations from them disproportionate to their critical value (as contrasted with their rarity value) in comparison with some of the larger

critical books which have been listed with only minimal descriptions of their literary contents. Here however, in Professor Thomas's selected list is a beginning. Sometime, perhaps there will emerge a comprehensive bibliography on J. C. Powys and his critics with a system of objective annotation providing information which will enable users to discern where there is material relevant for their individual purposes.

The impression gained from a reading of the "Selected Titles", that within Dante Thomas the bibliographer there is a Dante Thomas the whimsical collector struggling and too often succeeding in getting out, is strengthened by a consideration of the notes to the bibliographical entries. Here, in proper bibliographical manner, he provides, when possible, the history of each first edition's production, drawing largely from publishers' records and from reports by Powys himself in published letters (most, perhaps too, extensively from the *Letters to Louis Wilkinson*). However, his choice of supporting material appears often whimsical or based more on a desire to entertain than to inform his reader. For examples, there is a quotation of Powys's evaluation of Henry James as sample from his *One Hundred Best Books*; there are quotations of Llewelyn's criticism of *Mandragora* and of *Morwyn*; and, in the notes on *Morwyn*, we are given a full account of an anti-vivisection postcard printing quotations from *Morwyn* which "had rather wide circulation in Great Britain"; there is an account of the Rev. John Hamilton Cowper Johnson to whom *Wolf Solent* was dedicated; there are details of the lawsuit about *A Glastonbury Romance*, supported by the printing of a manuscript letter to Littleton from Mr E. E. Bissell's collection; there is a quite extensive explanation of Powys's finding of the name Porius in John Rhys's *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, together with a note of the segment of unpublished manuscript at Colgate University (though the Bibliography does not include notices of the locations of other manuscripts of novels). This seemingly random provision of odds and ends of knowledge sometimes

includes a fresh reference, like the digressive reference to Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*, 1934 (a work not found in Langridge), when Dante Thomas has gone in search of another example of Powys's "integrity", already shown in an anecdote included in Ruth LePrade's edition of *Debs and the Poets*.

It is abundantly clear that, while being grateful to Professor Thomas for initiating the production of full bibliographical description for John Cowper Powys, we should welcome his book, as it is welcomed in a brief foreword by Professor Wilson Knight, as "a feast of Powysiana". As Dante Thomas himself remarks in his Introduction, "whatever (Mr Langridge) may have missed will come to light as interest in Powys increases"; and, as he also admits, the task of making a comprehensive bibliography drawing in all United States reviews, "seems formidably extensive". Derek Langridge seems to have done incredibly well in this so far! Clearly, readers of Powys will go on discovering omissions from Langridge's and Thomas's lists, for a long time to come. At the time of writing this review, I noticed a dedication, omitted from Langridge's compilation: Erich Meissner, Warden of Gordonstoun School, dedicated *The Boy and his Needs*, Macdonald, 1958, "To John Cowper Powys who rescued philosophy from the sophisticated and offered it to the poor". More important, a postgraduate student of Bibliography at the Wales College of Librarianship, Aberystwyth, David Hunter, has recently informed me that neither Langridge nor Thomas found a short article Powys contributed to *Spain and the World*, May 1938. [We hope to reprint this rare item in the next *Powys Review*.]

One of the constituents of the "feast of Powysiana" provided by Professor Thomas, which we should welcome, is his detailed listing of the majority of the many changes

of names, and of the deleted and revised passages in the transformation of the American *Weymouth Sands* to the English *Jobber Skald*. He has provided also a fascinating discovery, a map of Glastonbury marked by Powys with all the places and houses of the *Romance*. (We are not told the provenance of this map.) And lastly, Dante Thomas's outstanding interest in the words on dust jackets brings us some interesting new literature. Outstanding reprints of these within the bibliographical notes include Powys's five neat paragraphs describing his aims in *The Art of Happiness* (all on the front of the dust cover), and the "publisher's statement" on the back cover of *The Religion of a Sceptic*.

In this little book, Mr Powys makes a special and timely appeal to that increasing minority of intelligent people who have grown weary and dissatisfied with all modern attempts to reconcile religion and science. Mr Powys points the way to a new approach to this whole controversy; an approach that neither outrages reason nor tampers with the dignity of faith. And he proves the essence of the whole matter to be something completely different from either mysticism or morality; to be, in fact, that imaginative heightening which human life requires if it is to keep its illusion of dignity and beauty in the presence of scientific truth.

Then there's that amusing front cover notice which seems to have been aimed at preventing *In Defence of Sensuality* becoming the "best seller" it did become.

To the Reader who may be tempted to pick up this superb book *pour le mauvais motif* it may be said that (while the author's title is the best possible for his purpose) "In Defence of Joy" or "In Defence of Saintliness" would be titles more obviously descriptive of the contents: and that not more than six pages in the whole book are devoted to Powys's noble treatment of sex.

BELINDA HUMFREY

*The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900—1939*, GLEN CAVALIERO.

Macmillan, 1977, £8.95.

There are other factors beside his knowledge of the subject and his critical ability that qualify Glen Cavaliero to write well on English rural novelists of the period 1900—1939. He understands the complex reality of country life and the complexity of the various ways in which it has been experienced and seen during a time of rapid social change and changing beliefs. He is not himself a romancer of primitive simplicities. He respects social reality and sees clearly the difference between an equivalent respect informing rural fiction and distortion of the world it ostensibly reflects or recreates. But he then distinguishes between deliberate distortions that serve legitimate artistic aims, and unconscious impositions of alien attitudes on the material. While he does not have a view of 'the real history' that is as dogmatic and as challenging as Raymond Williams's in *The Country and the City*, he is correspondingly more open to the numinous and the transcendent in fiction based on the country. Raymond Williams links together the names of Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, J. C. Powys, T. H. White and Tolkien in a sentence, connects them with other movements in the space of a paragraph and dismisses all as "a suburban and half-educated scrawl". Glen Cavaliero patiently considers the aims of Grahame and White, and in references and a long note repeats the considerable claims for J. C. Powys that he has made at length in his book on him. *The Country and the City* is, of course, far more wide ranging than *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel*, and it is also more exciting, more likely to provoke violent dissent from particular judgements and yet to change one's way of seeing the relation of certain writers to their material, but Glen Cavaliero's book has a rare patience informing another kind of commitment. He is at once socially aware and aware that there are more things on earth, at least, than are dreamt of by exclusively social philosophies.

When writing of the farmer novelists, H. W. Freeman, A. G. Street, and Adrian Bell, he is in consequence able to produce a model of understanding and intelligent critical discrimination, and the same gift is applied revealingly to the far more unusual art of T. F. Powys. It should be said that Glen Cavaliero sees all the novelists he considers in any detail, except T. F. Powys, as minor. He discriminates sensitively among the good, the indifferent and the bad, however, and his limiting assessments of good minor writers like Henry Williamson, Adrian Bell, E. H. Young and Constance Holme, both indicate the special distinction of each within his or her limits, and are properly undogmatic in applying the word minor to them. The effects of his approach are to make the reader want to read or reread certain books, and to show the interesting difference between novels that are merely symptomatic of abuse of the rural world by novelists and readers intent on weak-minded escape, from real country and real town, and those which, while remaining minor, have admirable but infashionable qualities. Constance Holme emerges as the finest example of the latter.

Glen Cavaliero's critical discrimination, and his strong awareness of the difference between mere escapism and use of rural life to symbolize perennial realities rather than to provide a realistic record, are displayed most effectively in his chapter on T. F. Powys. He admits that "There are times when Powys's earlier work, in its bucolic exaggeration, does indeed suggest *Cold Comfort Farm*", but shows clearly the aims served by his deliberately mannered and even distorting use of rural material. Powys, he maintains, "is a genuine seer" (but one whose "hermit-like existence occasionally led him to play the sage"), "and the development of his literary art is bound up with his quest for an appropriate symbolic portrayal of the workings of providence". He is in my view right to say that Powys "used his knowledge of the country to create a representative world within which he could work out his speculations on the nature of God and man". But

when, having acknowledged the “blend of humour and bleak tragedy” in *Mr Weston’s Good Wine*, he writes of Mr Weston that he “is not God omnipotent” and proceeds to consider precisely what kind of God he is, I want to add that Mr Weston is a God of a peculiarly literary kind, considering not only his antecedent namesake and literary vocation, and the novel a comic masterpiece which nevertheless provokes a teasing discomfort with the relationship between its creator and *his* fictional creator. This I find more disturbing than its tragic elements, because disturbing in a more equivocal way: *Mr Weston’s Good Wine* is very funny, but in this novel in particular Powys is a master of sudden transitions from the one meaning and emotion provoked by the word to the other. Here the releasing ‘ha-ha’ often turns unexpectedly to the haunting and perplexing ‘peculiar’.

When Glen Cavaliero writes “all the novelists considered here reflect rather than enlarge the consciousness of their time”, T. F. Powys is his exception. He provides a sympathetic but limiting assessment of Llewelyn Powys’s *Apples Be Ripe* and *Love and Death* (though his account of the latter strikes me as being rather evasive as far as ‘placing’ it is concerned, possibly because my response to this book is far less friendly than his), and a briefer one of Philippa Powys’s *The Blackthorn Winter*. It is ironical, though, that the one writer discussed here who does enlarge the consciousness of his time should also be not wholly of the tradition, hospitable to diverse talents as it is, which is the book’s subject. For a full account of T. F. Powys would require him to be seen as a modern in the context of other traditions, religious and literary, which developed in the last three centuries but to which far earlier modes of speculation and of parable contributed. And it is then a further irony that the great writers whose art is not primarily parabolic but who felt the tension between history and myth and contributed very different modes of social and psychic exploration to the rural tradition should be excluded from all but brief consideration. Although D. H.

Lawrence is Glen Cavaliero’s touchstone, he says little of him because he “has already been discussed extensively by other critics”. I do not think this is good enough. Lawrence is a touchstone for me, too, and for many others, but we need to know more of how Glen Cavaliero sees Lawrence, to understand precisely what, for him, the nature of the touchstone is. It cannot be assumed that critics have agreed, or any critic has decisively shown, exactly how Lawrence developed, altered, and (I would say) eventually abandoned some of the virtues of, the tradition he found in Hardy and George Eliot. J. C. Powys is at least equally important for Glen Cavaliero, but those who have not read his valuable book on Powys will find only a dim light cast on his importance by the references to him and the footnote. Writers who are not English are also excluded from consideration. While this is perfectly justifiable, it means that he only refers in a note to Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s *A Scots Quair*, a trilogy which is of crucial importance for its realism and the force of its language and rhythms, and because, as Raymond Williams says, it “moves through the classical historical process from country to city” but revolutionizes the conventional way in which it has been seen and felt. In these respects it offers a significant contrast to the inability of most English rural novelists of this period to transcend limitations of class, language and feeling. Other useful contrasts are offered by Welsh and Anglo-Welsh novelists, by Kate Roberts, Geraint Goodwin and Margiad Evans (all of whom contrast markedly with each other), and, for a contrast of another form of stylization and distortion with that of T. F. Powys, by the stories of Caradoc Evans. But the only serious criticism of the book that can be fairly made is of its omission of an extended consideration of Lawrence, providing an embodied touchstone in place of one that, by being largely assumed, is intangible. Otherwise it becomes a matter of naming names of which the author may or may not be aware, while his book will draw most readers’ attention, as it has drawn mine, to

some novels which they should know but do not.

There is, however, one point on which, if I have understood several observations in the book, I would strongly disagree with Glen Cavaliero. We are told, for example, that in the novels of T. F. Powys "the Dorset world he knew is used for fictional ends that transcend the limitations of his material". If this means exactly what it appears to say—which is likely, for Glen Cavaliero doesn't waste words and rarely writes a vague or cryptic sentence—I must record the contrary view that no humanly inhabited place is limited: the limitations are in those who do not see how waves of the modern world affecting social and psychic change reach even the most sequestered place, while where nature and man exist, *there* is the material in face of which the most consummate genius is ultimately limited.

But no criticism or disagreement must cloud the fact that Glen Cavaliero has written a highly readable book, which is generous in its use of quotations, perceptive and judicious in its criticism, humane in understanding and not infrequently witty in a turn of phrase, and which has what is sadly the uncommon distinction of making one want to read or return to several writers whose neglect by other critics is a measure, not of their worth, but of the limiting influence of fashion in exalted places. To call attention to those who have been unjustly neglected is, as Donald Davie has said, one of the most valuable tasks that criticism can perform. Glen Cavaliero has performed it admirably.

JEREMY HOOKER

## RESEARCH THESES ON JOHN COWPER POWYS, RECENTLY COMPLETED OR IN PROGRESS (BRITAIN)

Stephen Allen, University of Leicester, M.A., in progress, *John Cowper Powys's Use of Welsh Mythology in his Novels*.

Jill Clough, University of Hull, Ph.D., expects to complete 1978, *The Novels of John Cowper Powys* (chiefly considering the technical problems of a myth-maker who writes fiction).

Carol Coates, University of Exeter, Ph.D., awarded 1976, *John Cowper Powys: A Discussion of the Implications of his use of Nature and Nature Imagery in selected novels*.

Peter Easingwood (Lecturer in English, University of Dundee), University of Leeds, Ph.D., awarded 1976, *A Critical Study of John Cowper Powys*.

John Hodgson, University of Newcastle, Ph.D., to be completed 1978, *John Cowper Powys and the Art of the Novelist* ("it explores the imaginative integrity of Powys's work").

Andrew Larman, Royal Holloway College, University of London, M.Phil., nearing completion, *Welsh Themes and Concepts in the "Wessex" Novels of John Cowper Powys*.

Charles Lock, University of Oxford, B.Litt., just begun, *Thomas Hardy and John Cowper Powys*.

Susan Huxtable Selly, University of Leicester, Ph.D., to be completed 1978, *John Cowper Powys: the Wessex Novels*.

Robin Wood, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, Ph.D., in progress, *John Cowper Powys's Welsh Mythology*, with special reference to *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*.

The Editor would be pleased to receive further information about research in progress in Britain and overseas.

## AN ENQUIRY

In his *Autobiography*, John Cowper Powys refers to his life of Keats being declined by Methuen and returned to him for revision. Laurence Pollinger Ltd., Authors Agents, the representatives of the Powys Estate, are attempting to trace the present owner of the typescript, which they believe was purchased from G.H. Sims of Reading in 1956. If the owner, or anyone who has any information as to the present disposition of the typescript, would contact Gerald J. Pollinger (18 Maddox St., Mayfair, London, W1R 0EU) he would be very grateful.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN ALLEN is engaged in postgraduate research into J.C. Powys's Welsh Mythology, at the University of Leicester.

GLEN CAVALIERO is a member of the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *John Cowper Powys, Novelist*, O.U.P., 1973, and *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939*, Macmillan, 1977.

T.J. DIFFEY lectures in Philosophy at the University of Sussex. Since 1967 he has published articles on aesthetics regularly in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *Ratio*. He has recently been appointed Editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics*.

JEREMY HOOKER, poet, lectures in English literature at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. His published critical writings include *John Cowper Powys* (Writers of Wales Series), U.W.P., 1973, and *David Jones: an exploratory study*, Enitharmon, 1975; and a further study, *John Cowper Powys and David Jones*, is forthcoming from Enitharmon. His published poetry includes *Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant*, Enitharmon, 1974; two further volumes are expected in 1978, *Landscape of the Daylight Moon* (Enitharmon) and *Solent Shore* (Carcenet).

TIMOTHY HYMAN is a painter who left the Slade in 1967 and writes regularly on painting for the *London Magazine* and *Artscribe*. He has also contributed to *Studio International* and *Sight and Sound*.

BEN JONES is a Professor of English at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. He has edited, with James Downey, a collection of essays on Thomas Gray, *Fearful Joy*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974.

RICHARD LUCKETT is a University Lecturer in English at Cambridge and Dean of St Catherine's College.

MICHAEL ROULSTONE has recently completed a biography of the songwriter and playwright Charles Dibdin (1745-1814).

OLIVER MARLOW WILKINSON's publications include the play *Ishmael* (a Sybil Thorndike Trophy Award Winner), *The Journey*, and various descriptions of his experimental theatre work. He was Drama Director with the Iona Community, then Co-Director at the Oxford Playhouse. His performed works include *How Can We Save Father?* (produced for the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre), and various broadcast scripts including the adaptation of Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*. He has a contribution in Colin Wilson's latest anthology.

# THE POWYS SOCIETY

(President: Angus Wilson)

The Powys Society exists to promote the study and appreciation of the work of the Powys family, especially that of John Cowper Powys, T. F. Powys and Llewelyn Powys. Meetings are held three times a year, two in London; the third is a weekend conference in a provincial centre. Members receive copies of *The Powys Review* containing papers read to the Society and other material. The *Review* will be published twice a year.

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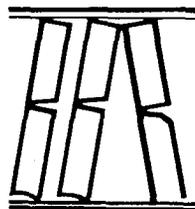
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