

# The Powys Review

NUMBER FOUR





# The Powys Review

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## Editorial

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William Ernest Powys, born in 1888, the last son of Charles Francis Powys and Mary Cowper Powys, died in October 1978. We send very special sympathy to William's sister Lucy, the closest to him of all his brothers and sisters, in feeling as in age. Lucy and "Will" stand apart from their eight well-published brothers and sisters in having resisted any public display of skill in writing or visual art. William, however, made many private paintings of the landscape of Kenya where he farmed from youth. We are glad to print two letters about William Powys, the man, from Gerard Casey who has also farmed in Kenya and knew him well. With these we publish two portrait drawings of William Powys. The first [Plate A], when he was about twenty, was drawn in red chalk by his sister Gertrude, well-known for her fine oil portrait of John Cowper Powys and her woodcut illustrations of some of Llewelyn Powys's books, especially perhaps *Earth Memories* and *Rats in the Sacristy*. The second [Plate B] is a sketch by Timothy Hyman, one of three he made this summer, 1978, during a brief visit to Kenya.

William Powys is well-known as a literary character to readers of Llewelyn's and John Cowper's works, especially perhaps as the admired "my brother", the man of action in Africa, of Llewelyn's *Black Laughter*. Probably the most interesting account of William occurs in Louis Wilkinson's *Welsh Ambassadors*.

During my early visits to Montacute he was a young boy, and he did not put himself forward. He has never been gregarious. His brothers so engrossed me that I noticed him very little. But he had evidently noticed me, with a derisive though not at all an unkindly eye. A comic epic, in which high sport was made, throughout, of my various failings and absurdities, issued from Willie's silence. I wish it still existed. I remember part of one verse, to which I am indebted for the title of the novel [*Swan's Milk*] to which I have referred. In my ignorance I had believed that swans were mammals.

"Oh, how do you do? (wrote Willie)  
And how's your swan?  
I suppose you milk him off and on—"

lines which should have their place in any Powys anthology.

But the most powerful impression of him, Louis Wilkinson called it an "enduring" account, is to be found in the last chapter of John Cowper Powys's *Autobiography*. (Here with Christian names reversed, we find something like the poet Wordsworth's feeling for his heroic brother, John, the captain who went down with his ship off Weymouth Bay in 1805.)

Twenty years! Yes it was no less than that since I had seen him last as a youth at Burpham. I had left him a simple boy, and I found him a formidable and mature man. Not only so, but I found him to combine with this massive strength an unselfishness beyond the unselfishness of women, and, along with this, that curious kind of smouldering unconscious heroism, such as distinguishes the most enigmatic and baffling characters in Conrad. How irrelevant a thing it seemed to me, as I watched him, and tried in vain to get from him any hint of the desperations that had marked his face, all my own wordy "dithyrambs" of psychological analysis! Art? Rhetoric? Criticism? Why here before me, in the face and figure of this man of my own blood, this sixth son of my Father, was actually present, realised in the flesh, all that heroic poetry I was forever gathering up in my struggles with Homer!

\* \* \*

Mappowder  
10th October 1978

The Editor  
*The Powys Review*

Dear Belinda Humfrey,

I enclose a copy of an item shortly to be published in the Montacute Parish Magazine which will be of interest to readers of the *Review*. Lucy—Will Powys's sister—and Mary Casey his god-daughter

and I were at Montacute Church for the tolling of the bell and like to think we represented all who would have liked to be present.

This short account refers almost entirely to W.E.P. in relation to Montacute. May I add a few words on his life in Africa? What that was can only be known to those who knew him there. But what it was will be reflected in the occasion of his burial service. I was not present but have a very vivid inner picture of how I know it to have been:

Hundreds of old friends of all races and backgrounds—old farmers, shepherds, cowherds, carpenters, sheep-shearers, blacksmiths, wagon makers, administrators . . . old African Tribesmen: Meru, Kikuyu, Masai, Turkana, Sambaru, Boran . . . young clerks, teachers, parsons etc. etc. etc. . . . and many children: all present to honour a friend they loved. For of the many gifts he had, his gift of friendship was the greatest. As a friend he was noble and generous-hearted beyond compare: and many in the most unexpected places will know that in him they have lost their truest friend.

*Gerard Casey*

### W. E. POWYS

(For Montacute Parish Magazine)

At 4.30 on the afternoon of 5th October parishioners may have asked themselves the question: "for whom is the bell tolling?" The bell was tolling for William Ernest Powys, the youngest son of Charles Francis Powys onetime Vicar of Montacute. "Will", as he was known to his friends, died the night before at his home in Kenya. He was in his ninety-first year. Sometime ago he had written to Mr. Rendell, the Captain of the Bellringers at Montacute, asking that the bell should be tolled for his passing.

While a youth and young man he had been a keen member of the Montacute team of bellringers. Throughout his life he delighted in recalling those days. He had recordings of the bells made and played



Plate A. William Ernest Powys, c. 1902, by Gertrude Powys



Plate B. William Ernest Powys, summer 1978, by Timothy Hyman.

them in his African home on all great and special occasions—at Christmas, at Harvest Festival, at Easter, to his friends and guests for their pleasure.

In 1914 he left his farm at Witcombe and went out to East Africa where he spent the rest of his life. He had learnt to be a farmer on the Abbey Farm at Montacute. In Kenya he became a very successful farmer and a fine artist in both watercolours and oils. He never forgot or lost interest in his many friends in Montacute. All through his life he kept in touch with them by letter and by visits whenever he returned to England. He always took and carefully read the Western Gazette and followed Montacute affairs in the Parish Magazine. Only three months ago he was in correspondence with the Bishop to whom he had written appealing

for a reconsideration of the decision, on the retirement of Mr. Bevan, not to continue the parish as a separate and independent entity.

He was a member of a family distinguished for its contributions to the life, art and literature of its time and was himself not the least remarkable of them for his many gifts and broad humanity of character.

It is hoped that later a peal may be rung on the Montacute Bells in thanksgiving for his life—and the lives so abundantly gracious of his brothers and sisters who all through long lives in widely differing fields remembered Montacute with affection and gratitude.

G.C.

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# T. F. Powys

## No Wine\*

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There are Christmas evenings when a man may stand by his garden gate to gossip with a friend, or listen to an owl hoot from the churchyard trees, without the least inconvenience from the cold. The air is often as warm and pleasant, on that almost darkest day, as it can be at any time of the year. But there will come, sometimes, another kind of Christmas night, when a charnel chilliness is in the air, and the threat of sleet or snow, together with a low-hanging mist, that has an ugly smell and comes from the north-east. Whatever foolish wight is abroad then will hurry his steps, button his coat tighter, and go where he had to go, as John Ford used to do, with his hat in melancholy guise, pulled over his head.

During the late afternoon of such a Christmas day as this, the country landowner and magistrate, Lord Bullman, drove his motor car up to the door of the Ladies' Club at Maidenbridge, to call for his wife. Helping the lady into the car, Lord Bullman sniffed the air. He believed it disagreed with him. And so, leaving Lady Bullman in the car, with her fur coat and a Christmas magazine for company, he withdrew for a moment or two—for only a moment, he told her—into the "Rod and Puss", to take a warm glass. He remained for an hour. When he returned, Lady Bullman addressed him as "Sir".

The car started off at a fast pace; it flashed through the town, and out onto the country road, and turning a corner near a farmyard, Lord Bullman drove into a cow. The beast had, of course, no right to be where it was, but Lord Bullman, as was his wont, believed himself to be entirely to blame. The cow was more surprised than hurt by the encounter, and had only

thought that a great star, blazing like a torch, had fallen out of the sky, and hit her rump. The farmer, who then came out of the cowshed, observed that the creature would die, and so Lord Bullman made amends.

When that was over, my Lord went on his way again, and finding it harder than ever to see, because the mist was thicker, he drove the car faster, and reaching a part of the road that was near to the great heath, he ran over something that nearly upset the car. Lord Bullman stepped out at once. And, no sooner did he see what he had killed, than he began to curse and shout, and to call himself a cruel monster, and a vile wretch, exclaiming that he ought to be shot dead upon the spot for committing so horrible a deed. Lady Bullman, hearing all this outcry, and supposing that, at least, he must have killed some poor woman returning on foot to the country, begged him to tell her what had happened. Lord Bullman, with many a deep groan, came to her, and held up a dead fox, with as splendid a brush as anyone could wish to see. The poor beast, in crossing the road, to rob a hen-roost, had been confused by the car lights, and so was killed.

Lady Bullman, though sorry for the fox, could not help saying, "Why, you often kill two or three of them when you go a-hunting."

"That is all quite different," cried Lord Bullman, "from this horrible murder."

"But it must be the same thing to the fox,—only a little less painful," observed Lady Bullman.

\*This is one of T. F. Powys's last short stories, previously unpublished. It has been provided for publication by Peter Riley.

"Oh! but only think that I should have done such a deed!" said her husband ruefully, regarding the fox with extreme veneration, as well as pity. Lord Bullman then placed the fox in the car, climbed in himself, shook his head mournfully, and started off again.

Because he had so unwittingly killed a fox, it mattered not—so my Lord thought—what else he destroyed, and so going as fast as he could, the car swerved suddenly, for the road surface was as slippery as ice, and knocked an old man, who was going the same way as he, into the hedge. The car righted itself, and Lord Bullman would not have troubled to stop, had not his wife remarked, "You might at least get out, and say you are sorry!" My Lord stopped the car.

The old man, who had been used so roughly—and, indeed, with the impact, it was a little surprising that he had not been killed as dead as the fox—was a tinker by trade, who used to go up and down the country, and was known by all simple and poor people by the name of Mr Jar.

At that moment, he might have been the very picture of Father Christmas himself, though his clothes were old and ragged. But he looked jovial enough for so old a man, who had lately had such a knock, and even Lord Bullman blushed a little when he saw whom he had thrown down.

"After running into a cow and killing a fox, you should have been more careful, my Lord!" said Mr Jar, smiling.

"How do you know that I have killed a fox?" enquired Lord Bullman, looking extremely uncomfortable.

Mr Jar nodded to the back seat of the car where the dead fox lay.

"My husband is a most careless driver," observed Lady Bullman.

Mr Jar turned to Lord Bullman. "Beware what else you drive over, Sir," he said, in a stern voice, that reminded my Lord of a low rumble of thunder, "for if you break even a box of matches, you shall suffer for it!" Tinker Jar walked on.

Lord Bullman started the car again. He was become thoughtful, and hardly heeded

his wife when she said that she wondered the old beggarman knew about the farmer's cow. Lord Bullman now drove with the utmost caution, so that Lady Bullman began to wonder if they would ever reach home,—they had eight miles yet to go.

Since Jar had spoken to him in so stern a tone, Lord Bullman was become an altered man, at least in his driving, for he now peered out into the cold, dank mist, like a pilot who had a thousand precious souls in his charge. All went well, until they were less than half a mile off Dodder Hall, and then Lord Bullman suddenly stopped. Lady Bullman gazed into the road before them, but she could see nothing there.

"What can be the matter?" she asked, a little fretfully.

"There is something in the way," replied Lord Bullman anxiously.

"Not another fox, I hope," said the lady, slyly.

"Oh no," her husband replied, as he stepped down to pick up a little packet from the ground, that, had they proceeded on their way, they must have run over. When he was seated in the car again, he held up what he had found for his wife to see.

"Why!" she cried, "that's only a two-penny packet of little crackers. You don't mean to say you saw that in the road, and never noticed the white cow!"

"Who, do you suppose, could have dropped them?" observed Lord Bullman, still holding the packet in his gloved hand.

"Some careless child," replied the lady a little crossly, "but if you stop over everything that you see, we shall never get home."

In a few moments they had passed the park gates and were beside the great door. Lord Bullman assisted his lady up the steps with his usual care. After that he stepped into the drive again.

"What are you going to do?" asked his wife, standing in the brilliant light of the open door.

"I am going to deliver this parcel," said Lord Bullman, as if he were the Weyminster carrier, and he held up the crackers.

When he said that, he strode off into the darkness of the long drive . . .

Dodder village consists of three little byelanes; in each one there are thatched cottages. In the centre of the village there is a green, around which there are four more cottages, built evidently to shelter the geese, who eat the green daisies, from the north wind.

Lord Bullman, who must have thought himself a goose, too, stepped upon the green, and wondered which of the cottages to take the crackers to.

The bitter wind now made the night really unpleasant, and Lord Bullman was about to throw the packet away and hurry home, when Mr Jar, the tinker, stood beside him.

"I drove slowly enough after we met one another," said Lord Bullman, who knew Jar by his beard, "but you must have come rather quickly to overtake me here."

"I came by the fields," answered Mr Jar, in a low tone.

"You walk very fast," said Lord Bullman, looking curiously at Mr Jar. "And, now that you are here, and have so Christmas a look, would you be so kind as to tell me to whom this packet belongs?" Lord Bullman showed Jar the crackers.

"It belongs to Katie," said Mr Jar. "She went to visit her aunt at Maidenbridge, and dropped the crackers on her way home."

"And where does Katie live?" enquired my Lord.

"Down Mill Lane," replied Mr Jar. "It's the third house that you come to, and the window-curtains are torn."

"Thank you," said Lord Bullman, and walked off in the direction that the tinker had pointed out to him. The wind blew more fiercely now, the elm boughs swayed like the arms of giants, and snow was falling. The barn-owl hooted mournfully.

The Holleys, who lived in the third house down Mill Lane, were very poor. Mr. Holley was a sick man; for many months he had been unable to work, and there was no money to spare for any merrymaking this Christmas. There was Poor Tom in the family, whose one ambition was to become

a sexton. But no one would employ him, and so he walked about the fields with his spade, and buried any dead bird or rabbit that he found, putting over each one a little cross cut from the hedge. And, as no sparrow falls to the ground without being noticed by someone, so poor Tom's crosses were not always passed by. Then there were the two elder girls—one with a baby—and Katie. There was also Mrs Holley. Mrs Holley had even that day been out to work, but had not been paid for what she did, and so there was no chance of a good supper that night.

Katie, who was the whole joy of the family, was twelve years old. It was she who had lost the crackers, for, as she came along the Maidenbridge road, they fell out of her basket. Even though they were gone, Katie did what she could to make the evening joyful. She laid the table taking the best plates from the dresser, and dusting them first, as a good girl should do, and then she turned to stir the fire.

The room was very cold. The firewood was damp, for poor Tom had let it lie too long in a rainstorm, while he stopped to bury a rook that had fallen dead of the cold. There was little to eat upon the table, there were no crackers, the biscuits were sodden, and the bread and cheese had no Christmas look, and might have done duty at any time of the year.

Outside, the wind howled, like a starved wolf, and blew a cloud of damp green smoke into the room. Mr Holley coughed, and Mary's baby began to cry, for Katie had promised her a cracker to make a bang with, but though the biscuits were brought home, the crackers were lost.

A knock came at the door. Katie, who had been trying to coax the smoke up the chimney, went to open it. She was the only one who kept a smile for a visitor. Katie supposed it was Aunt Winnie who had called. Aunt Winnie could smell cheese like a rat, and would never sit down to less than half a pound at a meal.

When Katie opened the door, her eyes grew round with wonder, and her smile failed her. But Lord Bullman hardly

noticed her; he could only look at the table. England's honour was always the first thought in his head—at least when he was not driving a motor-car—and the look of the table astonished him. Every English family in the land should keep Christmas, and spread the proper fare upon the table. In order to be sure what that fare was, Lord Bullman stepped further into the room. Katie thought he was looking at a cracked plate. But then he cried out, almost aghast at the awfulness of his own words, "No wine!"

As soon as Lord Bullman had said this, he went out of the cottage in a hurry, so that he even forgot to leave the crackers behind. When Katie saw him go off with them, she cried like the baby.

Lord Bullman went out in such a rush that he ran into Mr Jar, for the second time that evening. Without stopping to say that he was sorry, he went on. In a few minutes he reached Dodder Hall.

The behaviour of a fine gentleman is never found fault with. What he does must always be for the public good. The servants at Dodder Hall were so well trained that nothing my Lord did would have frightened them. Everything he did was right. He now put every eatable he could lay hands upon into a great hamper, as well as anything that he thought would amuse a baby. Lady Bullman only smiled at him, and went on eating her fish with the greatest composure. When my Lord ordered a dozen of old port to be put into the hamper too, the butler did his bidding, with the utmost gravity.

"But you have left the twopenny crackers behind," Lady Bullman cried, though he was already down the stairs. The butler hurried after him, carrying the packet with the greatest care.

Outside, the snow was falling fast; already the drive was white, but the wind blew less keenly, as if it had done its worst, and that only to lay a pleasant carpet of snow upon the earth. Outside the drive gates, Lord Bullman put down the hamper. He had carried it so far alone.

In his own domain, where he was Lord and master, every act he did was proper.

But now, outside the gates, matters were different. The hamper was heavy, and he wondered how to get it to the Holley's cottage. Christmas is a time of surprises. Lord Bullman stared at what he took to be a stump of an old tree in the hedge, whitened by the snow. When the tree moved, he knew it to be Tinker Jar. His beard was crusted with snow.

"What have you in the hamper?" enquired Mr Jar.

"Wine," answered Lord Bullman, "pudding, cake, fruit, and large boxes of the best crackers."

"Then give me Katie's," cried Mr Jar, "for I wish to be merry too."

Lord Bullman handed the little packet, covered with transparent pink paper, to the tinker. "And now we will carry the hamper," he said joyfully. They each took a handle.

Presently Lord Bullman set it down upon the snow.

"There is nothing in it," he cried, "Why the hamper has grown as light as a feather!"

"It's your heart that's grown light, and not the hamper," said Mr Jar, smiling.

"You needn't mention this in the village," observed Lord Bullman to Mrs Holley, when, with the help of Mr Jar, he carried the hamper into the cottage. "It's lucky I did not drive over those crackers!"

Lord Bullman helped to lay the table, and even Poor Tom, who had been burying a dead sparrow in the garden looked pleased. Lord Bullman set out the bottles, and as he had a corkscrew in his pocket, he opened three of them.

"Ah!" he said, "who would have believed it? No wine at Christmas."

Katie and Poor Tom pulled a large cracker. The baby laughed. Lord Bullman bowed, and withdrew.

Mr Holley's cough grew better, the fire burnt clear, and the room grew warm and comfortable.

"Come and dine with me," said Lord Bullman, when he stood outside the cottage with Mr Jar. But the tinker declined the honour . . .

Mr Jar walked alone through the night.  
He climbed Madder Hill and sheltered under  
a thorn bush, from the drifting snow.  
He took off the pink paper from Katie's

crackers, and pulled one. The cracker  
made a tiny bang. He pulled the other  
two,—bang! bang!

“No wine!” cried Mr Jar.

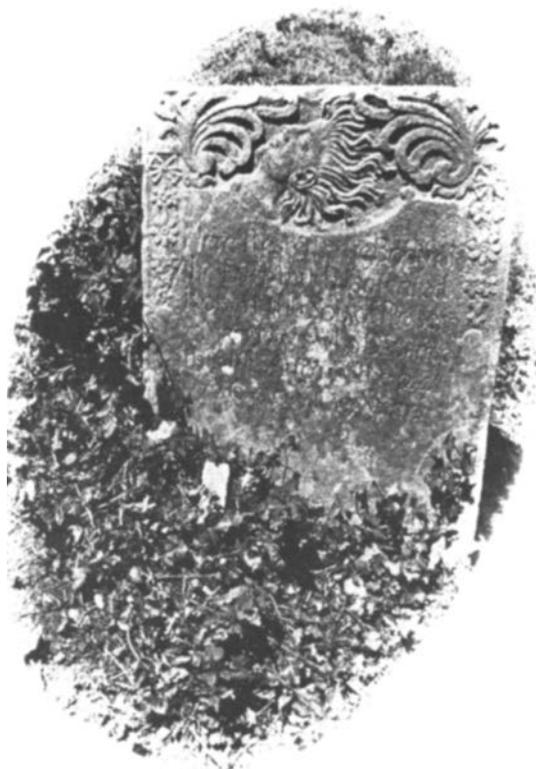
## Theodore Powys in Dorset *(for Gerard Casey)*

The churchyard wall's so close an old man in his bed  
may share the slumber through the neighbouring thick clay  
of the young man buried deep three hundred years;  
an ear serene in stone beneath the yew recalls  
slim bones that held a pulse of darkness, roused the lark—  
the downs' crest to them a threshold, clouds a roof.

The ancient one lies quiet and listens to the robin  
chiming in a holly thicket through the twilight glass;  
young flesh, loam now, can warm old aching joints.  
An unheard psalm, still with its own silence, counterpoints  
all death: life slays itself. The woodworm ticks away  
as the old man turns in bed towards the grave, the root of God.

Glen Cavaliero

The tombstone in Mappowder churchyard  
commemorating a nineteen year old youth  
who died in 1726. It was especially attractive  
to Theodore Powys who spent his last years in  
the cottage adjoining the churchyard and is  
now also buried there.





with her mother's immorality, that was her way of tormenting her. Last August there were wardens as paying guests and they picked all the mushrooms—four enormous women. I could not go for my walks without hearing them call *cavi*." He told me of hearing a harrow ring and clatter *for no reason*. It might have been an owl, or a hare sitting on it. This was the only explanation except a supernatural one. I suggested that it was a child angel playing at see saw. "My depressions come," he said, "and then I am tired, tired of the sky, the same, the same. I have only two thoughts—love and death. People are tired of hearing me propound the doctrine of evil. Nobody wants to read my books except perhaps Indian peasants. I would be ashamed to look like Dreiser. If you make money you lose your personality . . . It does not matter what anybody thinks; it only matters if they can eat or not eat."

April 24th. A wet windy day. I walked over the downs and looked at a little circular clump of gorze. I could see all the road from there. Theodore met me at the door. We walked along the road to West Chaldon sheltering in the lime kiln shed. Theodore said he always shut the door carefully lest Mr Cobb should see it open and put a lock on it. The shed was bare. I sat on a tin. There was the dusty wing of a sea gull. He said women think of nothing but love. It is their nature to give pain. How the blackbirds sang coming and going. Theodore said he did not know the difference between the song of a thrush and the song of a blackbird but he knew a particular blackbird lived down there. Jim Trask aged 70 had been convicted of assaulting a child of 12 in weymouth. He was fined only £20. If a great man gets so little an ordinary person might be let off. He thought Mr Bryer had invented the name Bowl Eaze. We met Alyse at the green pond and stood watching the newts languidly, voluptuously paddling to the surface to breathe.

May 1st. A lovely afternoon, turned off the Roman Road and then carried a thorn twig. Theodore met me under High

Chaldon. I told him of our walk to Flowers Barrow and how we had met an engine driver in the woods who said "I hope I am not trespassing sir." And how I thought he said, "I suppose you know you are trespassing." I told him how the man was carrying cowslips in his hands and how burnished and sensitive he looked and how he turned out to be the father of the boy who brings coal up to White Nose—the same boy, I added, that Gertrude says steals coal. Theodore chuckled. "It is always the same," he said. "All your stories end like that. We are always looking for what is sweet and honest and always find a thief!" I picked some tall cowslips in a hedge. I told him how Polly was dying and how well she looked and how death would come in a second to the most healthy. "You don't say you have lived so long and only now learned that." "I am naturally dead," he said, "Romance keeps me alive—when it is taken from me I am driven back to my natural prison. It is different with you. You are naturally happy. What you wish for would be good *added* to good."

[“]Perhaps Francis [Powys, his son] did not get on with Miss Duncan (his employer in Nice) because he was too honest. We would have entertained her in more ways than one. My only interest is in this glamour. Nice is a corrupt city. It would have suited *us* well.[” “]What tree is this tree in the dairy field?” “An ash,” he answered, “any tree that stands alone I take to be an ash.” We crossed over the swamp. “You can always trust rushes.” “I am writing a short story making God out to be a top hat.” He picked a cuckoo flower. “I am always terrified of death. It is the best way. It is so awful that you will probably die *because* it is so awful.” We passed a little girl Violet carrying a bat and wickets to play with another little girl at the house of John Trim the cripple. [“]He lives on the parish, on 10s a week, he manages very well, safe, serene, happy. He corrupted Gerty B.'s girl of sixteen, but the corn-merchant Mr Chap had to pay. They are now hurrying over there for their evening prance. When your brother John came he said what a strong nice man. I said I did not

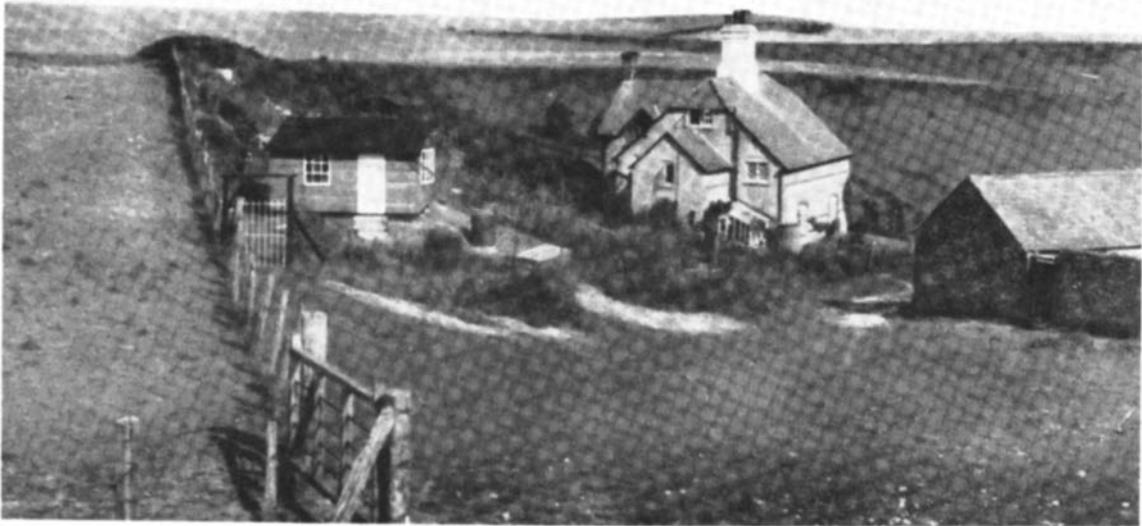


Plate C. Chydyok, the home of Llewelyn Powys, 1931-1936.

like Jack Trim. I never walk by the house unless I am with you, except in the winter when I walk on these downland valleys. In the afternoons I walk over High Chaldon, and in the evenings to Rat's Barn. For Trim and Payne would always have time to make fun of me—they would not confine their attention to their pasture. They would always find time for this added merrymaking.["] L.P.: Why should they not be afraid of your making fun of them? If you sent them to gaol they would be made fun of. "It would be impossible. They are too cunning. If anything happens it is always Mr Chap, the corn-merchant." I caught a newt—an alligator's head and small belly spotted yellow.

May 8th. Katie's [Philippa Powys's] birthday. Spent the morning on the cliffs with her. I hid my present, a turtle, back in the grass at West Bottom. Theodore was ready to go out. He had had bad neuralgia. He said even when you had such pain it was difficult to understand. "It was necessary to understand that life was one state and Death was a different state—a state without feeling. It was difficult to understand." We walked over High Chaldon to the double hedge and sitting on an ash tree bough smoked cigarettes.

"It is a blessing if life can ever be netted. It gets congealed and hard and icy. Nature is wonderful, a gardener can get something even out of poor land, out of unfertile pastures." The cowslips were tall in the grass. We got back at 5 o'clock. Doris was returned. She told us that the mother's old dog had eaten all the eggs in a goose's nest. He had been set to keep away the foxes. I asked whether they punished him. Doris said "no." "Mama was the only one in and she was afraid of him." This made Theodore's eyes twinkle. "I hope God may feel like that towards me." Theodore told me that Ivan the Terrible on one occasion went far into the steppes and asked at the houses in a village to be taken in. An old poor man showed his pity. He was given a large pension, the rest of the houses in the village were burnt and the people's throats cut. He said that on another occasion he sent to a certain village for "a bag of fleas", and because the bag when it came was not quite full, he fined the village 2,000 roubles. After tea he showed me the stone he had found. It was as large as a skull and with a hole for corn grinding but I do not think it was artificial. He had carried it across two fields and left it in a pit. Any

relationship outside marriage, fornication, adultery—all dangerous and yet as Burton says when opportunity offers who can resist a temptation so exquisite and lively, so intimate? not even the Gods can resist it. Burton says nobody can “And I commend them, but Jesus taught to avoid.[”]

May 14th. A misty foggy day. I walked by the dip in the gorge on the downs from where I could see the road from Chaldon. It rained. We sat in Theodore’s room. I asked him whether he could remember shooting a wild duck at Sweffling and Mr Nun biting its head to kill it and he saying that he was probably a dog in his last incarnation. And whether he could remember ferreting rats by the river with toothache. I can remember that last, he said, I can always remember pain. Of course, he said, it is lust—concupiscence—he pronounced the word with whimsical intensity—that is my ruin. Girls are all the same. I suppose — would rather be with a young boy, anyone at all rather than with me. Of course I am more gross than you, always was. I don’t want anything intellectual. I want little animals’ roguery. I don’t like ladies. You are lucky!

We went out presently. The chestnuts in leaf and the elms all green with hedge parsley tall on the banks and the birds singing. We passed Billy Lucas, the village drunkard. I said I thought with Rabelais I had seen more old drunkards than old doctors. Theodore said he was keeping sober because of a bet. Half a crown from one ten shillings from another etc. I asked how long for. He said for a good while as those who bet him would have been looking after the money. We went over the Five Marys and towards the main road. We passed Bob Legg. I admired his leather coat. We discovered afterwards from Violet that it had been given by Molly. Lulu has a sharp eye! We went to the pond at the bottom of green lane. It was overgrown but no good hiding place. The May was in bud. Theodore asked me how many times I had walked by the grove, I said three times. He said 150 times for him. How many more times? I said one day alive, even your worst day, you would gladly live again if you were

let out of the grave. Theodore said you might be so enamoured of nothingness that you would not choose to. We passed through East Chaldon, the streets were empty. It was 5.45. All the labourers have their tea at this hour. It is safe to pass through the village. They are the most conservative people in their habits. I said it shows how ignorant they are never to look for change. He said no wonder townsmen cheat them. They have their tea and some clever dog picks their purse from the coal shed where it is hung up. I was wearing my new mackintosh with rubber leggings. “It is as though you were dressed in armour like a mediaeval knight . . . They had the money to buy armour and therefore never got hit.” I told about Mr Smith in Swanage who was Hilda’s mate and how he ate minced liver and never spoke to Hilda. He knew that Mrs Smith would have something to say if he did!

May 22nd. Friday. A bright hot day. Gave Jack Trim the feather of a red lory as I passed his cottage. Walked with Theodore through the village. He told me of the proverb

Take a man from [? the sea]  
An enemy he will be.

“You often see in the paper,” he said, “an account of some poor middle-aged gentleman in his Sunday clothes who is cursed for not saving a drowning wretch worth nothing.” “I thought the other day,” he said, “how that my companions on earth are cows and birds. I go up High Chaldon smelling cows, hearing cows, seeing cows and when I walk birds are always around me—the other day I almost ran into a great sea gull behind a hedge. I am far more with birds and cows than with human beings.”

We walked up the drove. I confessed how nervous I was at seeing quoted in an advertisement that I had said “John has genius, I and Theodore originality.” He *had* seen the advertisement. He said he did not feel annoyed. It was honour done to the eldest brother. They say in the East they always address him as “my most honoured

elder brother". The horseshoe vetch was up in the grass. We walked on the moor. I went in and up to the window. There was a spray of gorze in a vase and this was enough to make Theodore want to go away. We sat smoking sheltered behind gorze bushes. He said he thought *Unclay* was better than *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, less preaching in it. We arranged that he should come to breakfast with me on Wednesday. We saw two little girls at the top of the Five Marys. Two workmen were coming up the hill. "Those chaps look as if they knew what they were after." We spoke of the *Fables*. It is bad enough for people to abuse what you write, but they must needs find other fables—worse fables and say that they are better. I said, passing the churchyard, "Will I be buried this summer?" "You will if it is your destiny to be. Nothing can stop it. We can only be as cautious as you." I saw the swallows going backwards and forwards between the leafy hedges. "It is impossible," I said, "to believe there is such a thing as death when the roads are so sunny and the swallows are skarking about for flies." I admired very much the white on their backs. We were late for tea. Alyse on the sofa looking charming but a little sad. Theodore when walking out with her afterwards said that man's natural state was melancholy, that when he was gay he was fearful, that all the great buildings that were not for use or frivolity were put up in a

melancholy mood—the pyramids. Otherwise what could possess these apes to pile stone upon stone. They could never be thoughtless beings. They were always wanting something that was not.

June 13th. Walked over the downs and met Theodore outside. I told Theodore that someone had written a book on genius (Will Durant) and had said John Cowper Powys is perhaps the only living genius. Theodore said "Well he has always considered himself a genius. From a child he thought of himself as the King of the Fairies." I said I had not smoked for a week, had given it up. "Oh!" he said, "Now you will outlive me. I'll go to a place soon enough," and then with a comical wry look, "What can I get you to do to harm you?" He had been reading Epicurus. "There," he said, "is a master whose every word is of gold. Lucretius was right, he is a God. In this modern world where all is confusion how wonderful to read words of Truth. He is the greatest philosopher. Plato nothing to him. Even Jesus is not always wise. I have been reading his words about "my Father glorifying himself" like a schoolboy on a sandcastle. This is inconsistent with Godhead. When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus what is Truth, he had been wise if he had shouted out at the top of his voice "Epicurus," that would have been fine. It would have made Pontius Pilate wash his hands again.["]

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# Gerard Casey

## Three Christian Brothers\*

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Many of us will have read Timothy Hyman's study in *The Powys Review*, 2: "The Religion of a Sceptic"—the title as we know of one of John Cowper Powys's innumerable essays. I wish to bring up some considerations relevant to a just understanding of the religious thought of John Cowper. However I think much I say is valid with modifications in an approach to a deeper understanding of Theodore and Llewelyn also. Perhaps it is admissible to add that my appraisal stems not only from the published works but also from personal contact in friendship with John Cowper Powys over a quarter of a century—and also with most of his brothers and sisters. To share in some degree in the life of a family so closeknit—so free, frank and penetrating in the responses to each other among its members, has been a source of deeper understanding.

Timothy Hyman was kind enough to let me see a later version of his essay in which he develops his theme in greater detail. He there subdivides his material under four headings which I will use here as a convenient schema for my own approach. Apart from these headings my references are to the text of the version already printed in *The Powys Review*. (See however his additional writing on Dostoevsky.\*\*)

### 1. Three Christian Brothers

Louis Wilkinson has told us that he thought of "Three Christian Brothers" as a possible title for his book *Welsh Ambassadors*—and proposed it for the brothers' consideration. John was enthusiastic. Theodore non-committal. Llewelyn indignant. These responses are in themselves significant. I think the title—though not perhaps a suitable one for

Louis's book—could be an excellent one for a more serious study. It has the merit of being accurate in so far as they were born into a Christian family in a Christian society and were baptised. Their father was an ordained Christian priest and they were brought up in strict practice of the rites of the Anglican Communion. I would add that the title remains valid in some degree at deeper and more personal levels. It is clear however that before going on to give some substance to this last claim, we must make some distinctions. All three brothers reacted strongly against ecclesiastical Christianity. John ended in seeming indifference to it. Theodore came at last to a limited and wary acceptance. Llewelyn was—throughout his adult life—trenchantly hostile. These reactions run very much deeper than the rejection of the conventional Anglicanism in which they were brought up—though there is no doubt they found this stifling to their spirits and heavily complacent in its acceptance of the values of late Victorian England. That is true—but I do not think any of them would have felt happier in any other of the great historic Churches—though John was at one time attracted to the Roman Church for temperamental rather than genuine religious reasons.

The reasons for their rejection of institutional Christianity can I think be traced to two sources. First the established Churches represented the majority—what might be called the historically triumphant

\*This paper contains the substance of an address given to the Powys Society at Weymouth in September 1978. It served as an introduction to a discussion on Timothy Hyman's essay, "The Religion of a Sceptic".

\*\*Published in this *Powys Review*, 4.

opinion. And of 'majority' and 'triumphant' opinion they are always ineradicably suspicious. But secondly—and this was—and always remained—of equal importance in arousing their hostility—the official theologies of the Churches were rooted in Greek Philosophy rather than the Bible. In spite of the Reformers this remained true of the Protestant Churches. This meant theology reflected for the most part impersonal categories of pure thought tending in practice to an abstract legalism. We don't need to read far in any of their writings to realize their intense suspicion and distrust of such modes of thought especially when applied to religious subjects. Of majority opinion and abstract rationalism they always remained obstinately questioning.

But in these two reactions I think their insights were more genuinely Christian than much of what passed for Christianity in the Churches. Here if anywhere they were in fact at the growing point of genuine Christianity. The Churches were—to a large extent—certainly not entirely—an amalgam of ancient religion and Greek philosophy. Historically this was more or less inevitable—or at least understandable—but the fact remained and occasioned revolt in all minds with true Christian insights whether inside or outside the Churches. The Christianity of the New Testament was concerned with compassion, love, creativity, the freedom of the spirit realized in suffering—all values which received only a very limited emphasis in the Churches. Here I would like to digress a moment: any too quick and unrelenting judgement of the Churches in respect of this is naive. I think of words from a poem by Seferis: "in the mirror we see the enemy and the stranger". In the history of the Churches—as in all history—we see ourselves mirrored large. And if the reflection we see is not a noble one let us remember it is our own image. I think Llewelyn was guilty of this form of naiveté.

At this point a brief excursus on the religions and philosophical background of their age may prove helpful. The revolt

against abstract rationalism had been gathering impetus in widespread movements across the whole field of European civilization throughout the nineteenth century. In this the Powys brothers were at one with their time. The root of the revolt ran back to the first century. Whatever else happened when the Christian religion first erupted into history it was then that the values inherent in the creativity and freedom of the spirit started to flow with truly revolutionary and transfiguring effects into the societies of the ancient world—with all the immeasurable force and depth peculiar to Christian vision. The limited 'freedom' of the ancient world to 'fit in' to the cosmos—and it was in this 'fitting in' that ancient wisdom was rooted—was transcended in a transfiguring creativity flowing from a freedom rooted beyond the circles of the cosmos conceived as a purely 'natural' order. Greek philosophical determinism could not accommodate the notion of such a freedom which was however already implicit in Homer and Greek Tragedy' as it was in the Old Testament. For this reason hellenistic theologies could not in the long run provide a true basis for genuine Christian vision. This fact was working itself out into the open by the fifteenth century. It became clear the 'mediaeval synthesis' could not hold. The history of Europe has been dominated since by the struggle to control the incalculable forces that had been released into the cosmic order in the first century. From this point of view—that is from the point of view of the struggle for control—the freedom of Christian vision appeared often as disorder, as an-archy. Free acceptance of the suffering incident to the disruption of the old order became a transfiguring force freeing man from the meaningless repetition—with all its cruelty and fatality—of the endless cosmic cycles. Yet the temptation to evade this suffering by attempted returns to a pre-Christian world-view was and is always present. All systems of philosophical determinism—in so far as they live on into the Christian era—are rooted in such evasion.

Against this background of the conflicts disrupting the consciousness of modern western man the Powys brothers reacted in very different ways: though essentially the search for personal integrity, creativity and freedom was the driving force in each of them. John Cowper responded with an anarchic Christian vision which was never quite able to break out of his over-riding subjective aestheticism. Theodore moved to a resolution rooted in late mediaeval Christian mysticism (Eckhart, Boehme). Jeremy Hooker in a recent study<sup>2</sup> of Theodore's writings has also come to this conclusion. Llewelyn, who was not really aware of the deeper issues, stoutly resisted from early days the demands of the freedom of the spirit and stubbornly held to the limited 'natural' freedom he thought he found in Epicurus. But this was a desperate remedy which left him in inner conflict with his need to realize more profoundly the meaning of his Christian inheritance.

## 2. Christianity and *A Glastonbury Romance*

Under this heading Timothy Hyman discusses in detail and in an illuminating way the *Glastonbury Romance* as a reflection of John Cowper's responses to the Christianity of the past, in the main through his handling of the Grail theme and the creation of the characters Holy Sam and Bloody Johnny: the first an exemplar of an uncomplicated rather simple-minded evangelism: the second a Guerdjieffian wonder-worker and mage. He does not take up the character of Matt Dekker—a figure portrayed in an intensely human and sympathetic way that will command deeper interest in many readers than the other two.

However I do not think any of these three characters elicit any special insights of a kind significant for a possible Christianity of the future. For such insights we must look rather to the whole range of characters covered in the major novels. We find intricate patterns of relationship of the most diverse kinds acting and interacting against very varied social backgrounds. These relationships include forces emanating from non-human sources—organic and

inorganic, planetary and stellar, from the past and the future. All is fluid, open. All is—even if at times only in the most rudimentary sense—living and personal—incarnating the values of creativity and freedom. Abstraction is at a minimum. All modes of being may receive epiphanies or become the vehicle of epiphanies for others. It is this all pervading incarnational vision—it has much in common with the poetry of Homer—that confounds and offends many readers. All this is profoundly congenial to a truly incarnational Christianity. Compassion, generosity, forgiveness, freedom from moralistic judgement penetrate in a quite extraordinary way the whole psychic atmosphere of these novels. That too we may hope will become characteristic of the future Christianity: even as it is rooted in the Christian vision of the New Testament. This "multiverse"—note the singular form which implies no denial of ultimate unity—with its pluralistic vision of indefinite multitudes of personal beings—will certainly be found more acceptable to a genuine Christian philosophy than any abstract impersonal mode of thought tending to monism. The ultimate unity implied is pure unconditioned freedom: the ultimate unity of Boehme's Ungrund: a freedom in which all beings are rooted, which cannot be rationalized away and is the source of all creativity. Here—despite all indications to the contrary,—the personal visions of John Cowper and Theodore come very close to each other. The purely philosophical perspectives implied have much in common with Leibniz and Ward's "Realm of Ends".

John Cowper Powys was at the height of his powers in the writing of *A Glastonbury Romance*. And it is in this novel that the kind of vision outlined above comes through most clearly though it is certainly and always present in all the novels. All the characters great and small, old and young, wise and simple, men and women, exhibit an inviolable personal uniqueness rooted in their freedom to be themselves. This freedom with all its possibilities of creativity—of what Whitehead could call

novelty—is often deeply overlaid—deep almost as life—by impersonal social conditionings. But it is always present. And none are beyond redemption. It is in this direction that the religious significance of the novels lies rather than in the specifically ‘religious’ characters.

### 3. Mythology not theology

Here Timothy Hyman makes central to Powys’s religious perspective his remark that “what our instinctive human nature demands is mythology not theology”. This may be true up to a point as a statement of instinctive demand but it is clear that a corrective to the immediate satisfaction of “demands” is needed. I am friendly to myth as a vehicle of truth: however this saying of J. C. Powys’s reflects the Powysian distrust of the faculty of abstraction, of pure intellection. As it stands it solves no problems. There are many myths: there are myths of salvation, myths of deification, myths of dissolution, myths of evasion: there are myths that lead on to more abundant life, myths that lead on to darkness and death. Whether “our instinctive human nature” is a fit instrument to cull out myths as a farmer culls his sheep admits of some doubt. And I have a notion we should be—and most of us are—very wary before we swallow any myth—however illustrious its genealogy—‘hook line and sinker’. The attempt to subject any and every myth to the scrutiny of the intellect cannot be dispensed with. Plato was a great myth-maker. He was also a great thinker. There is no irreconcilable antagonism here.

But we must not take the dictum quoted above in too unequivocal a sense. John Cowper was in fact—as T. J. Diffey<sup>3</sup> in his recent excellent study makes clear—no tyro in the fields of either pure philosophy or philosophical theology. And no reader of his work as a whole is likely to misinterpret the remark in too simple-minded a manner. The animus is clearly directed against modes of thought centred too exclusively in any form of abstract rationalism. And it must be confessed that this is a charge that can fairly be brought against most

academic philosophy and theology—certainly and overwhelmingly so up to the end of the eighteenth century. The great struggle in western thought over the last two hundred years has been to correct this. In the field of theology this is as true as in every other field. The Bible-centred theologies of our time are unrelentingly bringing the same corrective to bear on theologies rooted in Hellenism and seeking to break down the constrictions and evasions inherent in these theologies. All three brothers were lifelong and close readers of the Bible and were saturated in its characteristic vision of the world and man. Their revolt against abstraction was largely the result of this—and this at least they shared with our contemporary Biblical theologians. The ‘atheism’ of Llewelyn was a refusal to worship an abstraction and a necessary movement in his search for God. That this was not vain his stone on the cliffs above Chydyok bears witness: “the living, the living he shall praise Thee”. A similar movement lies at the heart of the ‘death of God’ theology today. So understood, the protest remains valid. Christianity in history, rooted as it is in creativity and freedom, is always transfiguring itself into more adequate manifestations of its deeper visions—and in these transfigurations such protests play a maieutic role. Christians who shrink from this truth should read again the parables of the Kingdom of God.

### 4. Dostoevsky as the Type of the Prophetic Artist

It is I think in this section that Timothy Hyman brings us to the heart of the matter. “No other figure” he tells us “influenced Powys so deeply as Dostoevsky”. I think a case may be made out for this purely at the level of literary influences though even there it is open to challenge in more than one direction. However for our purposes and subject here we may accept it without too much cavilling together with its consequences for our understanding of J. C. Powys’s religious thought. Dostoevsky was

a Christian and a life-long member of the Russian Orthodox Church.

I have claimed that the New Testament was concerned with "compassion, love, creativity, and the freedom of the spirit realized through suffering". All this is to be found in Dostoevsky and is all summed up unforgettably in his *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*—where we should remember the Grand Inquisitor is forgiven in Christ. It did not however originate in Dostoevsky but in the New Testament. If this is the true religion of Christ then Powys had met it long before he ever read Dostoevsky: he had met it in the New Testament. That he was fully aware of this he makes clear in his essays on the Bible and on St. Paul.<sup>4</sup> That he was aware too of its transfiguring reflections—however attenuated—in the lives of many Church Christians and the life of the Churches through two thousand years of history—there can be no serious doubt. In so far as his essential religious insights remained true to this—as I think they did—he remained a Christian in outlook.

I have been speaking of New Testament Christianity as a revolutionary world-transforming religious vision rooted in the creativity and freedom of the spirit. And I have acknowledged that this vision has been barely realized in the Christianity of the Churches. However it has remained always present at the heart even of ecclesiasticism—I do not think that as a historical fact this can be seriously denied. Or that the Churches with all their failures remain the source and the vehicle of this vision in history. That the Churches' attempt to incarnate the vision in history should be distorted by the religious outlook of the ancient world and also by hellenistic rationalism was inevitable given the cultural complex of the world into which it first emerged. That in every later age it will be largely conditioned by the prevailing modes of thought is also inevitable. Yet too in each age the New Testament vision remains actively working in and transforming the world. Inside the Churches too, genuine New Testament theologies are always seeking to realise themselves. Very

few Christians inside the Churches who are conversant with the theological movements of our time and sympathetic to them will find anything in the writings of the Powys brothers to either astonish or distress them. Rather the contrary: such readers will be struck by the profoundly Christian (in the deepest and truest sense) tone and temper of much of their writing. I speak of the tone and temper rather than their explicit opinions though even there there is much that is entirely acceptable to New Testament theology.

I do not think it possible that any reader of John Cowper Powys's two essays—on the Bible and St. Paul—can fail to gain a deep and challenging impression of all that Biblical religious vision as a whole meant to him. (Much the same can be said of numerous passages in the writings of Theodore and Llewelyn.) In these two essays it is significant that the only Biblical text that comes in for some hard knocks is the Fourth Gospel: John remarks trenchantly and dismissively "we might be listening to Plato or Plotinus".<sup>5</sup> Clearly he feels more at home as Pascal did with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob than with the God of the philosophers. His sympathies are all with the "existential" vision of St. Paul as over against the "metaphysical" vision of St. John. Yet it is in St. John's Gospel that we meet the utterance so destructive of all metaphysical dualism: "The Word was made flesh". That the blunt and overwhelming directness of this saying has been an offence to many and that it has often been attenuated in the interest of Neo-platonic idealism is true. That however is not the responsibility of the Evangelist. True Christian insight will find in Emile Nolde's Last Supper a fuller reflection of the Gospel than is to be found in Leonardo's great painting.

I would like to bring these considerations to a close with some comments on Timothy Hyman's reading of J. C. Powys's basic religious insights. Of the many protean aspects of John Cowper he finds most congenial the J. C. Powys of the "Saturnian Quest". Much of what he has to say is full

of interest but is I think more concerned with the exploration of the psyche than with religious insight. Religion is not psychology or the exploration of the indefinite potentialities of the self: though such explorations may be at times of marginal interest to it. Religion is 'religio' 'that which binds': man to man, and man to God. It is not "what a man does with his solitariness".<sup>6</sup> It is rather concerned with the transcending of solitude. In so far as the "Saturnian Quest" has genuine religious implications it seeks to establish these by a return to a pre-Christian pagan myth which has no true power for the world of today. A myth that is creative for one age may well be evasive or even destructive in a later world age. There is in the "Saturnian Quest" a retreat from the enormous strains and conflicts of our time: at the very centre of which lies the striving to re-create in all its depth true Christian vision. The future 'Kingdom of Saturn' is at best only a pale pre-figuration of the Kingdom of God promised by Jesus: the Kingdom which is at every moment being fabricated instant by instant in the living present of each of us out of time into eternity: in so far as we use our freedom and creativity to bring it into being. History as we know it is the result of our freedom to bring the Kingdom of God into being or reject it.

Here again we must not oversimplify. That the "Saturnian Quest" exerted increasing influence over John Cowper's imagination in his last years is hardly open to serious doubt. But are we to see in this an advance to deeper vision? In so far as it is an attempted return to a pre-Christian world-view: that is to ultimate identification with cosmic process, it is a surrender of the freedom of the spirit to cosmic determination. The last word lies with ananke not freedom. But this is a denial and contradiction of all he had striven for earlier in his life. And it is accompanied by an element of self-deception: if the Kingdom of God cannot be taken by storm one just about faces and slips back into the Garden of Eden—a pretence that the Angel with the flaming sword no longer stands at

the gates barring return to the paradisaical world. History as continuing creation worked out by man in suffering and freedom is denied.

But I do not think that the Saturnian theme in John Cowper's later life can be so interpreted: although it is true that Christian anarchism is like all anarchism unstable and uncertain in its insights. It can never be more than a corrective and is necessarily in itself fragmentary. The "Saturnian Quest" understood as an attempted inner emigration from a beleaguered city becomes a myth of evasion. The civilization to which John Cowper—and most of his readers—belongs can only destroy itself if it seeks to return to such a pre-Christian vision of the world. But such a rigorous interpretation of the ultimate implications of the Saturnian myth—if taken seriously as a possible basis for the present world-age—would I am sure be unfair to him.

Rather it is entirely understandable that a certain weariness should set in in the last two decades of a long life spent in intense creative activity and that it was permissible to let go of much and tell oneself pleasant stories: stories not to be taken too seriously. Is the world of *Porius* "an altogether harsher world"?<sup>7</sup> Rather I suspect that John Cowper remained grimly aware that the fairytale romanticism of *Porius* had little relevance to the realities of twentieth century history: that the death of Christ still had a word—perhaps the only word—to say to the world of Auschwitz, Dresden, Hiroshima and the Gulag Archipelago. "Creative lies" in this world savour of mockery.

However all this may be it is certain that in his full vigour and maturity—roughly the sixth and seventh decades of his life—his thought reveals deep affinities with the Christian visions of St. Paul and Dostoevsky. However tempted he may have been to return to the magic world of prehistory and the enchantments of the cosmos it was in the "mind of Christ" that he found "the best hope of our blasted civilization", as he himself put it in his essay on the Bible. He would never have retracted those wor-

ds—written in his mid-sixties—or those others in the same essay where under the rubric “Old Testament” may be included all pre-Christian myth:

The Gospels are radiant with youthful joy

and hope . . . the Old Testament has a beautiful and poetic light shining from it but it is the light of a sunset streaked with human blood. Whereas the light that shines from the New Testament is the light of dawn.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See the essays on Homer and Greek Tragedy in Simone Weil's *Intimations of Christianity*. Also Reinhold Niebuhr's *Beyond Tragedy*.

<sup>2</sup>“T. F. Powys: ‘The Bass Note’” in this *Powys Review*, 4.

<sup>3</sup>“John Cowper Powys and Philosophy”, *The Powys Review*, 2.

<sup>4</sup>In *The Pleasures of Literature*, 1938.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, “Saint Paul”.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted by Hyman, *The Powys Review*, 2.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, see the last two paragraphs of “The Religion of a Sceptic”.

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# Timothy Hyman

## John Cowper Powys and Religion: Dostoevsky as the Type of the Prophetic Artist

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No other figure influenced Powys so deeply as Dostoevsky; and his significance was not only as a novelist (“as much greater than all other novelists as Homer and Shakespeare than all other poets”) but also as a religious prophet. “Dostoevsky”, writes Powys in *Visions and Revisions*, 1915,

is more than an artist. He is perhaps—who can tell—the founder of a new religion. And yet the religion he “founds” is a religion which has been with us for more years than human history can count.

Much of Powys’s writing may be seen as an attempt to define this Dostoevskyan “religion”, which is both new and old. It is, says Powys, Christianity; but “a Christianity completely different from what we are accustomed to”. It is a religion of compassion, connected with Dostoevsky’s “extraordinary interest in the ‘weak’ as opposed to the ‘strong’”. But it is also a religion of mystical experience. Powys points to . . . “all the perverts and abnormalists whose various lapses and diseases become, in these books, mediums for spiritual insight”,

Madmen, idiots, drunkards, consumptives, degenerates, visionaries, reactionaries, anarchists, nympholepts, criminals and saints jostle one another . . . but not one of them but has his moment of ecstasy.

And in such a moment, Powys declares,

Then it is that the most real seems the most dream-like, and the most impossible the most true, for the flowing of the waters of life have fallen into a new rhythm, and even the children of Saturn may lift up their hearts!

Clearly this essay presents something like a programme for Powys’s own work. He

had just completed *Wood and Stone*, with its conscious championing of the weak. But although echoes of Dostoevsky appear throughout the early fiction (for example *Wolf*, when he sees the “face on Waterloo steps”, thinks of Ivan Karamazov and his “handing back the ticket”) yet it is not until *A Glastonbury Romance* that Powys arrives at any comparable complexity or intensity. The elements divertly derived from *The Possessed* (the pageant from the “governess’ benefit”, the murderer Codfin from the convict Fedya) are much less convincing than the general atmosphere of Dostoevskyan apocalypse. Yet the religious content built into the book’s plot, constantly works against Powys’s psychological explorations of character. It is only in *Weymouth Sands* that Powys creates a narrative with Dostoevsky’s fluidity, where the sense of a new “flowing of the waters of life” is superbly realised in the book’s imagery of water and sea.

Powys speaks of Dostoevsky “substituting” for a religion of love, a religion of pity. Yet if Powys also deals with the weak, it is with a much less lurid kind of outsider. Dostoevsky’s great gallery of Holy Fools, ranging from the Dreamer of *White Nights* to the terrible voice of *Notes from Underground*, opens onto the small bed-sitting rooms of Powys’s milder deviants. His work takes on, I believe deliberately, but also in conformity with English social life, a greyer tonality. No one in all his books is as good as Myshkin, as base as Lebedev, as evil as Peter Verkhovansky. Characters such as Cordelia Geard or Magnus Muir have none of the romantic sublimity of Dostoevsky’s sufferers and sinners. They are the truly weak, the truly disregarded.

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In his essay of 1938 in *The Pleasures of Literature*, Powys writes of Dostoevsky as having "carried the whole massive art of novel-writing into a new dimension—the dimension of the nerves". Comparing him with Hardy, Powys had contrasted the virtues of a "good man" like Gabriel Oak—"simplicity, sagacity, and loyalty"—with the much more explosive and nervously-conceived "goodness" of Alyosha Myshkin. In following Dostoevsky into this "new dimension", Powys abandons as little as he can of Hardy's more commonsense moral view, creating characters who are "good men" as well as prophetic and intuitive. He notes how Dostoevsky's characters never seem to have any work to do,—thus affirming, according to Powys, that "the real reality of a person's life is not what he works at, but what goes on in his mind". His own protagonists also, unlike Hardy's, will be those who lack any defining social role.

In 1945 Powys published his first long critical study, *Dostoevsky*. Its first chapter bears the title (recalling Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*)—"Why Dostoevsky is the greatest of all novelists", and throughout the book Powys emphasises how Dostoevsky's world view results in a new aesthetic:

he has the power of making all other novelists seem dull in comparison; dull—or artistic and rhetorical . . . we have the ominous feeling, as we listen to what his most disturbing characters are uttering, that he himself is as startled, shocked, awed, and impressed by what they reveal as are their hearers.

When at the centre of *A Glastonbury Romance* Powys had declared his own aesthetic manifesto, he had contrasted the traditional novelist's artificial constructions, with the "sublime surprises" of Nature. And Powys sees the "surprises" in Dostoevsky (the way events seem to have a realy autonomy, to come out of nothing), as connected with Dostoevsky's essential plurality of belief:

This astonishing writer does not content himself with revealing in his oracular and

prophetic outbursts any one coherent vision of life but several contradictory visions, and for this very reason approaches more closely than any other novelist to that "real reality" for which, as Goethe hinted, Nature herself finds utterance, expressing herself multifariously and through many different tongues.

Powys is obviously, like Dostoevsky, deeply affected by Christian tradition:

It is hard to see how a deep and formidable artist can remain indifferent to the thickening and subtilising of the human situation brought in by the phenomenon of Christianity.

But there is a distinction to be made:

to accept these secrets of God in an orthodox sense is one thing; to make use of them to intensify and deepen our natural vision is another.

Ultimately then, Dostoevsky's "religion" is nearer to Nietzsche's "Amor Fati", the acceptance and the relish of experience, than to any ecclesiastical Christianity. Powys emphasises the confessional note in Dostoevsky's writing, but confession not merely as an agonised expression, but because it was his "chief need and enjoyment". Central to Dostoevsky's nature is a "mysterious and profoundly feminine enjoyment of life, *even while suffering from life*". Nowhere is the affinity between Powys and Dostoevsky clearer than in this:

Though not a single one of his books ends "happily", the final impression is the reverse of hopeless . . . perhaps a profound deepening of one's sense of the mysterious *perversity* of all human fate is the thing that lingers, a perversity which is itself a kind of redemption, for it implies arbitrariness and waywardness, and these things mean power and pleasure even in the midst of suffering.

And in Dostoevsky's vision, as in Powys's, we must recognise "a way that remains through thick and thin uncommitted to any absolute faith in God".

What seems to occur in the years after *A Glastonbury Romance* is a decisive shift of emphasis in his religious position, not only from Theology to Mythology, but from a vague individualism towards a more active libertarianism. *Dostoevsky* was apparently largely completed in 1942, (four years before it was actually published); and one important aspect of the book reflects wartime hopes and fears about world-communism. In 1942, a general European revolution seemed to Powys, as to many others, a possibility. Dostoevsky's idea of Russia as saviour of Europe, so often dismissed as mere reactionary Pan-Slavism, now seemed to take on a prophetic validity.

Powys persisted in viewing Soviet Communism as potentially a religious way, as a product specifically of Russian spirituality. He quotes Berdaev's assessment that the "essential" element in early Christianity was "handed down by the Orthodox Church" (and so, by implication, to the present régime). Yet also throughout the book the figure of Bakunin is brought into play, as in some sense a counterpoise to Dostoevsky. Bakunin was explicitly anti-clerical. (Powys quotes his dictum, "God exists, therefore man is a slave. Man is free; therefore God does not exist".) Yet Powys is surely right in regarding the great anarchist leader as fundamentally religiously motivated; just as Dostoevsky, for all his theocratic opinions, remains a libertarian. Both are, in their generosity and compassion, radical; both are united in their opposition to political or religious tyranny. Taken in conjunction with Berdaev (whom Powys read widely at this time) Bakunin and Dostoevsky can be seen as representing three different positions in the spectrum of what might be called "Anarchist Christianity", and this is where Powys can be broadly located in these years.

In the final chapter, "Dostoevsky and the Present Crisis", Powys makes his sympathies towards Communism clear:

... alone among militant movements, Communism puts an end to all those race-barriers and colour-bars and tribal taboos by which

our Western Democracy has been warped and perverted, and Western Capitalism disgraced and confounded.

To this extent, we must recognise the claims of world-communism, and give it at least a degree of allegiance:

... We have learnt by bitter historic experience that the only hope for a truly new world lies in an *authoritarian unity of purpose among the have-nots*.

Powys himself admits to an identification with Stefan Trofimovich in *The Devils*, "a certain timid, old-fashioned idealist". But in the late '30s a real process of politicisation had taken place in Powys. He laments the failure of the Spanish war:

... How many of us wish, and wish in vain, that we had at least saved Catalonia . . . so that there might have been one experimental commonwealth in Europe with a real actual practising cooperative rule from below.

In 1942, Powys had completed *Owen Glendower*, with its theme of a small nation claiming independence, and he had embarked on his even more ambitious "Romance of the Dark Ages", *Porius*, in which Cronos, in the role of Merlin, attempts through Arthur to bring about a Golden Age. Here the ambiguity of Powys's fusion of politics and religion and prophecy in art becomes most obvious.

Throughout his study, Powys has seen Dostoevsky as a writer who provides a catalyst for his readers, by constantly focusing on "the three deadly taboos—sex, Religion, Race". In this way he presents an inherent challenge especially to the values of the English gentleman:

We can, I think, judge the quality of a writer best from the quality of the people who find it hardest to read him; and I am sure our ruling class would far sooner give its days and nights to study the Fairies of the Brothers Grimm than the Furies of the Brothers Karamazov.

Powys relates the religious position of the typical British intellectual (who "without

being violently iconoclastic” has “aimed at a secular goodness that manages to dispense with the supernatural”), to the Pelagian heresy of the Dark Ages, which will be one of the themes of *Porius*. “The Dark Ages”, Powys goes on,

. . . have other things too in common with our time; for the old classic culture lay dying, and a new epoch destined to last two thousand years was being born. Now *that* epoch is dying and we are feeling the terrible birth-throes of the one that is to follow.

It is within this millennial view of history, in which religion and society will interact in a plurality of ways, that Powys’s thought develops throughout the 1940s. Like the naive hero of Dostoievsky’s *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, Powys finds himself imagining the advent of a Golden Age. And the “new religion” he attributes to Dostoievsky, both prehistoric and of the future, obviously represents the prophecy, if not the fulfilment, of this new/old dispensation.

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# J. M. Turner

## Life-Illusion and Stupid Being

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The reader of John Cowper Powys is continually coming across strange and startling psychological insights; and there can be none stranger, I think, than those to be found in his book *Dostoevsky*.<sup>1</sup> Half-hidden among the long, convoluted thoughts and extravagant statements of the last two chapters of this book are the rudiments of a completely new psychology, an analysis of personality superior to Freud's because it is simple and direct and does not require the services of an expert.

Powys had little use for the concept of the unconscious, believing in the mind's power of self-knowledge. In the chapter entitled "Dostoevsky versus the Unconscious" he lists his own three favourite "magic words or symbols" (179) collected from various sources for the purpose of analysing characters in fiction and in real life.

First comes the word *secret*, which Powys borrowed from Matthew Arnold. The "secret" of a character is the "essential quality" of its existence (180). Powys's special use of this word is more universal than Arnold's "secret of Jesus",<sup>2</sup> but both notions have the sense of something felt from within yet communicable and discernible if we are sensitive and alert.

Next comes the phrase *life-illusion*, borrowed from Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. The real inventor of this phrase is Mrs. F. E. Archer, whose translation of the play<sup>3</sup> was, according to its introduction, the first to appear in English. In a footnote she gives us the original Norwegian, "'Livslögen', literally 'the life-lie'."<sup>4</sup>

Central to the story of *The Wild Duck* is the conflict between Relling the doctor, and Gregers the idealist. Relling's method of helping the "poor sick people who live under the same roof" with him is to "foster the

life-illusion in them".<sup>5</sup> He attacks Gregers for "dunning us with claims of the ideal".<sup>6</sup> Gregers's devotion to the ideal, to "truth", makes him impatient with other people's illusions and drives him to meddle in their affairs, with tragic results.

Powys loved to go through life flattering the life-illusion not only of his friends and acquaintances, but "of birds, fishes, beasts—especially dogs and cats . . .—and of every man, woman and child I meet".<sup>7</sup> But it *is* an illusion, a *life-lie*, as both Powys and Relling were aware. Gregers, Relling and Powys all thought of themselves as "helpers": it was part of *their* life-illusion. But the method of fostering people's life-illusions, though it might help nobody at all in any deep sense, is at least comparatively harmless.

It is not only from idealists like Gregers that our life-illusion is at risk. In *Visions and Revisions* Powys writes that Dostoevsky's characters, "at certain moments, seem actually to spit gall and wormwood, as they tug at the quivering roots of one another's self-esteem [i.e. life-illusion]. But this fermenting venom, this seething scum, is only the expression of what goes on below the surface every day, in every country".<sup>8</sup> And who are these characters? They are brothers, sisters, parents, children, husbands, wives, lovers, friends, and enemies. Are all these people idealists like Gregers?

We all have life-illusions. As T. J. Diffey points out,<sup>9</sup> our life-illusion is the central idea we have of ourselves. If we are robbed of it, life seems to lose its meaning—so we cling to it as a drowning man to a straw. Our life-illusion can be quite a variable and complex idea. Everything with which we identify—country, job, family, social stan-

ding, political party, religious creed, a role in life, a whole lot of thoughts, images and opinions about ourselves and the world—all this makes up our life-illusion. When any of this comes under attack, we feel it is *we* who are being threatened. We *are* our life-illusion. “My life-illusion”, my “self” or “ego”, is identical with what we mean when we use the words “I” or “me”.

“Everybody I meet seems to want to assert their ego”, writes Powys in his *Autobiography*. “‘I! I! I!’ they cry. No one seems to get the depraved pleasure I get from turning my ‘I’ into thin air and helping my friend’s ‘I’ to swell and swell till it’s a regular balloon.”<sup>10</sup>

The third of Powys’s magic symbols is the phrase *stupid being*, borrowed from Gertrude Stein. As far as I can discover, the only one of her books to make use of it is her novel *The Making of Americans*. “Every one,” she explains, “has in them some kind of stupidity inside them. In each one it is of the nature of that one . . . With some their stupid being is mixed up with anxious feeling, with some with their impatient feeling, in some with other things in them, in some it is just there in them . . . , it just lies there quiet, at the bottom of them”.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike “secret” and “life-illusion”, which occur elsewhere in Powys’s writings, the phrase “stupid being” (as far as I can discover) occurs only in the last two chapters of *Dostoevsky*.<sup>12</sup> Like the other two symbols, he makes more of it than its inventor.

Neither Powys nor Gertrude Stein attempt to *define* “stupid being”. We can only define a word in terms of other words, but we want to be able to see and feel the reality to which the word is pointing. My feeling is that the term “stupid being”, though more difficult to grasp than “secret” or “life-illusion”, *does* point to something real in human beings.

From Gertrude Stein we gather that stupid being is not quite the same thing as stupidity, although those with less of it are likely to be less stupid; that different kinds of character have different kinds of stupid

being; that some have more of it than others; and that it is sometimes “mixed up” with emotions and sometimes quiet. From Powys we learn that it “underlies the nature of all men” (191) (and not only characters in fiction); that it is something physical in the body, a “substance” (180), an “opaque and slow-moving mass” (185); that it can be influenced by “reason” or by “nerves” (185); that it can be cultivated in the form of “physical sensations” (187-188); and that it can be turned into a symbol, “the Body of Christ”, by “an act of faith” (190-191). Life-illusion and stupid being are intimately related and partake of the same qualities, so that it is hard to say where one ends and the other begins.

Powys starts by applying his “clue-words” to characters in fiction. He has three categories of writer: the naturalistic novelists, the supreme writers, and Dostoevsky (who seems to be in a class by himself somewhere between the first two). According to Powys, the “secret of the characters invented by the naturalistic novelists, such as Thackeray & Trollope and Tolstoy and Turgeniev . . . consists in the presence within them of a vigorous life-illusion confronted by a considerable quantity of *stupid being*.” Their stupid being is “conventional, racial, social and class conscious”, and their life-illusions “take for granted” and are “quite complacent about the presence within them of this social ‘stupid being’.” “The ‘life-illusion’ of any young gentleman in Thackeray or Turgeniev” would not “be outraged by the meanness, narrowness, and self-satisfied complacency with which he slinks and twists and squeezes and pushes and debouches through the alleys and backyards of the moral and racial class-conventions of his time” (180-181).

“The ‘secret’ of the characters invented by the supreme writers”—Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, Homer—“implies the presence within them, too, of a good deal of ‘stupid being’; but it is ‘stupid being’ of a totally different kind”. It is “earthy and human and animal and planetary and universal”, “super-social, super-racial and

far too simple, sensuous, and passionate in its quality to be conventional". Their "stupid being" is as fully accepted by the 'life-illusion' of all these characters as is their personal appearance", and "the 'life-illusion' of these persons" would not be "outraged and troubled by an animal and sensual lapse" such as "Don Quixote amorous of Maritornes or Sancho befouling himself from fear" (180-181).

As for Dostoevsky's characters, the peculiar thing about them is that "the only stupid being in them is racial. It is Russian 'stupid being' . . . It is so common and unassuming . . . as to be practically negligible to the reader." So sexually, religiously and psychologically aware are the "Russian 'intelligentsia' Dostoevsky knows so well, that the reader begins to feel at last that persons like Stravrogin and Kirillov have no 'stupid being' in them at all!" (181).

My own impression on reading *The Possessed* was that Kirillov's stammering and Stravrogin's feelings of futility and detachment are clear evidence of the existence of at least some stupid being; and this stupid being plays a vital role. For Powys maintains that Dostoevsky's novels predict the future. They "represent a world from which the ancient, classical, democratic alliance between man's reason and man's 'stupid being', so prominent in Homer and Shakespeare and Rabelais and Cervantes, has been eliminated" (189-190). Dostoevsky prophesied that our stupid being would come to be dominated increasingly by our nerves through propaganda and terror, as happened in Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia (188-189), and is still happening today.

What of Powys's own novels? In a well known passage from the *Autobiography*, he writes:

My writings—novels and all—are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life. It is the prophecy and poetry of an organism that feels itself in possession of certain magical secrets that it enjoys communicating. And, by the way, I

certainly feel conscious of conveying much more of the cubic solidity of my vision of things in fiction than it is possible to do in any sort of non-fiction.<sup>13</sup>

Our subjective impression (and this is all we have to go on in these matters) is that the stupid being of the characters in Powys's novels is racial—that is, it is English through and through. It also manages somehow to be both class-conscious and unconventional. The peculiar thing about some of these characters is that the relationship between their life-illusion and their stupid being is quite conscious, deliberate, cunning, and subtle. In other words, they practise Powys's philosophy.

Essential to this philosophy is the cultivation of physical sensations, or the "Wordsworthian secret". Powys regards this cultivation of sensations—"especially those which have nothing to do with sex and have Nature as their background" (185)—as peculiarly English, and as the reason why the English are so good and harmless and immune to the propaganda of clever governments! What we do, says Powys, is "cultivate our 'stupid being' to such a point that it covers our nerves with the ointment of sensation. Our aristocracy has done this to perfection, but it permeates us all" (187-188).

Now Powys himself never cultivated his stupid being to this point, as any reader of his *Autobiography* or his novels can discover. Had he done so, he would have lost that sensitivity and vividness of imagination which were so characteristic of him. But the important thing is that we have now established the connection between stupid being and physical sensations. The implications are clear: firstly, that the pursuit of sensations is the means whereby the quantity of stupid being in us is increased; and secondly, that the increase of stupid being has a desensitising or dulling effect on the nervous system.

Most people, I think, are only aware of their stupid being *indirectly*—through the symbolism of dreams; through physical

sensations, itching, aches and pains, pleasure and displeasure, blushing etc.; through its resistance to our efforts and struggles; through the dullness and heaviness we often feel, that dullness which lies deeper than tiredness after a day's work. No doubt the whole thing can be "explained" chemically and physiologically in terms of a deterioration of the nervous system and the body tissues, in terms of blood flow, hormone balance, muscular tension and relaxation, and so on. We can easily *imagine* how such physiological phenomena might be felt directly as a physical substance in the body—but I think it likely that such awareness is given only to a few neurotic individuals, and to a very few sane individuals. Such phrases as "taken for granted", and even "fully accepted", do not imply simple and direct perception. Even the most Powys-like of Powys's characters—such as Wolf Solent, Sylvanus Cobbold, and John Crow—are not portrayed as being directly aware of stupid being, but only indirectly, through the medium of sensation. Was Powys himself directly aware of it? Only he could have answered that.

According to Powys, Dostoevsky had much less stupid being than most of us (191), and it was his "less *annointed nerves*" that enabled him to become such a "receptive *medium* for all the intense magnetic human currents of Russia" (188). I have a notion that Powys, too, had less stupid being than most of us (though more of it than Dostoevsky), and this was what

enabled *him* to become such a receptive medium for the influence on human affairs of the inanimate and vegetable in Nature.

As he says of *A Glastonbury Romance*, his novels are "not the work in any sense of an 'observer of real life'."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this "unrealistic" imaginativeness and sensitivity to Nature which makes up the atmosphere of his novels is itself a prophecy, a foretaste of "the coming alliance of the 'reason' in man with the 'stupid being' in man" (185). Or is it only a hope? If we would become converts to Powys's philosophy and "vision of things", we would somehow have to wipe the slate clean of stupid being, and begin all over again. For it seems to me that we have cultivated our stupid being so that it has not only covered our nerves with the ointment of sensation—both Wordsworthian and non-Wordsworthian—but has also dulled our senses of perception and impaired our capacity for happiness.

It remains to be discovered whether this apparently inevitable increase in the quantity of stupid being in us can be arrested. We have yet to investigate the possibility of a renewal of life and energy, a rebirth of the mind, a new clarity. In order to become more fully alive, it may turn out that we will be compelled to forgo the cultivation of our stupid being and our life-illusion altogether. Powys would probably advise against such a thing, or at least advocate extreme caution, for fear of the "devils" (188-189) and "cohorts of jumpy nerves" (187) which might then break loose.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Dostoevsky, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1946; Village Press, 1974. Subsequent numerals in parentheses in my text refer to pages in both editions. The text of the 1974 edition is a facsimile of the first (1946) edition.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (1873), chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup>Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts: An Enemy of the People: The Wild Duck*, Walter Scott, 1890.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>7</sup>*Autobiography* (1934), Macdonald, 1967, p. 454.

<sup>8</sup>*Visions and Revisions* (1915), Macdonald, 1955, p. 184.

<sup>9</sup>T. J. Diffey, "John Cowper Powys and Philosophy", *The Powys Review*, 2, 1977, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup>*Autobiography*, p. 453.

<sup>11</sup>Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (1934), Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962, p. 137.

<sup>12</sup>Apart from a brief reference in *Morwyn* (1937), Village Press, 1974, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>*Autobiography*, pp. 641-642.

<sup>14</sup>*A Glastonbury Romance* (1933), Macdonald, 1955, Preface, p. xi.

# Peter Easingwood

## John Cowper Powys and the Pleasures of Literature

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One cannot separate John Cowper Powys's view of literature from his attitude to his own direct experience of life. That he has such a definite attitude is clear from the *Autobiography* (1934), where he is much preoccupied with the "shape" (6) his life has taken, and with the quality of his experience. Powys's other writings, to be fully appreciated, must be read in the light of the *Autobiography* and the account he gives of his own imaginative strategy. His argument concerns the uses of the imagination. Every individual inhabits the world as it is, but also creates a mental environment of his or her own. That we should acknowledge this power within ourselves is Powys's concern. This theme is active in his fiction and discursive philosophical books, and it also decides his literary interests.

*Visions and Revisions: A Book of Literary Devotions* (1915) represents a first stage in forming what Powys liked to call "a philosophy of one's own" (MC 15), starting essentially from the question "What can be added to our life from reading?" (VR x). For Powys literature is essential—he makes it quite clear how difficult it would be to exaggerate this in his own case—in shaping an individual response to life. "The choice of the books one reads is indeed one of the few important gestures one is permitted nowadays to make." (MC 31) With this gesture in mind one can examine Powys's literary background. He envisages far more than a casual interplay between the books one reads and other forms of experience: "No man, however learned, can be called a cultured man while there remains an unbridged gap between his reading and his life" (MC 33). When Powys writes about literature, it is with the force of a personal commitment that he is ready to declare.

In *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938) and *Rabelais* (1948) Powys's imagination is at its most fertile; these books represent his power of vision as distinctively as the *Autobiography* itself or *Wolf Solent*. Admittedly they have their limitations as well as their peculiar kinds of intensity. His approach inevitably seems dated. Insofar as he seems to acknowledge the tendencies of modern criticism, he resists them. His methods are largely impressionistic and expressive. From *Suspended Judgements: Essays on Books and Sensations* (1916) one gathers that "atmosphere" rather than "structure" will be a key word:

I can only speak for myself; but my own preference among writers will always be for those whose genius consists rather in creating a certain mental atmosphere than in hammering out isolated works of art, rounded and complete.

For a flawless work of art is a thing for a moment, while that more penetrating projection of an original personality that one calls a mental or aesthetic atmosphere, is a thing that floats and flows and drifts and wavers, far beyond the boundaries of any limited creation. Such an atmosphere, such a vague intellectual music, in the air above us, is the thing that really challenges the responsive spirit in ourselves; challenges it and rouses it to take the part which it has a right to take, the part which it alone *can* take, in recreating the world for us in accordance with our natural fatality. (428)

This emphasis on the "fatality" which governs our reading is entirely characteristic. The impersonal exercises of objective criticism mean very little to Powys. Judicial criticism he regards as an impertinence, and he tries to avoid giving negative or final judgements. Powys's view

of what others would call a literary work is decidedly limited, and he sometimes uses evasive rhetoric in his reaction against critical theory: "All literature is 'literature of power.' All literature is 'literature of knowledge'. All literature is 'literature of escape'." (PL 2).

Yet Powys discriminates sharply for his own purposes. He constantly displays fine verbal tact: this point needs all the stress one can give it, because he is so windy and rhetorical at his worst, and such a feebly conventional poet. *Rabelais* is, among other things, a work of some linguistic finesse. In the literary essays his use of language has an integrity which yields a deeply-considered view of the pleasures of literature. His personality is wholly engaged, whether he chooses to identify with the author or the reader. It is significant that he does not absolutely distinguish between these roles. He recognizes the writer's "obstinate struggle with the obduracy of words" (VR xvi) but he also wishes to see reading as part of the creative process (MC 34). The reader enjoys, with Powys, a privileged intimacy with the literary text.

Powys offers a key to his method in the Conclusion of *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938):

Oh! how strongly I am persuaded that in our choice of books we should be both eclectic and pragmatic; humble, as Keats says, before the 'eternal spirit' that inspires them all, but bold and unscrupulous in giving their most sacred and exclusive eloquence a shrewd twist to suit our present-day hand-to-mouth occasions! (659)

He is aware, as the full context shows, that academic criticism can hardly accommodate such a personal emphasis. This is the "charlatanism" of which one hears so much in the "Europe" chapter of the *Autobiography*, clinched by the unauthorized intrusion of Keats and the "eternal spirit". It is, "all the same for that" (see A 388), bank of extraordinary range and power. The eclecticism he recommends is displayed in the range of essay

subjects, classical and modern, Hellenic and Hebraic, from the Old World and the New, and in the cross-fertilization which goes on between them. The habit of frequent quotation and cross-reference is one of the finest accomplishments of Powys's style; and he constantly uses this variety of illustration to create a world-picture of his own. For example, he can pay tribute to the distinctiveness of a particular author and yet, by using a scheme of cross-references, assimilate that author to his own essentially pluralistic vision. The following passage on Whitman works in this way. It shows considerable refinement in the way it relates Whitman's view of nature to that of other writers, and altogether it expresses a complex relationship with landscape. It also complements certain passages in the *Autobiography* by suggesting how Whitman's poetry helped Powys to come to terms with America, to adjust himself to landscapes from which he might easily have felt alienated:

Every great poet reveals some aspect of the inanimate world which save for his insight we might have missed, or caught only in unconscious snatches. And the aspect of the inanimate revealed to us by Walt Whitman is of all others the least attractive to senses that only respond to the sunny, the cheerful, the ingratiating. It is, in fact, an aspect of things that strikes many of us as we go through the world as bleak and forlorn, devoid of bloom and fragrance, all, in fact, that is left over when what most beguiles, endears, and seduces has been washed away, as if by a salt tide.

It is the litter and the debris omitted by Homer. It is the slag and the offscouring, the rubbish and the desolations, that Wordsworth put aside to enjoy the clear-cut shadow of a flower upon a stone, or the reflection of a naked moon in a mountain tarn. It resembles the sort of thing that would be found in the path of one of Dostoevsky's lacerated spirits, as on the outskirts of a town he leaves his mud-planks for a muddier tow-path.

But the lover of Walt Whitman sees these things with an exultant eye, and with a heart that responds to this ooze and mud and

murk, as if there were an immortal soul in such desolations. (*PL* 460-1)

Powys insists on the value of juxtaposing different, even conflicting insights; he courts the danger of self-contradiction as serenely as his favourite Whitman. His aim, as he makes clear in his most ambitious literary argument *Rabelais*, drawing further illustrations from Melville and Whitman, is to support the idea of a pluralistic universe. Imaginatively speaking, Powys is always restless with the world as it is; to contemplate alternatives to it,—other versions of reality, worlds elsewhere—is second nature to him. How prolific and eccentric a writer he is in this respect his novels best show; and he himself felt that in his fiction he had most fully embodied his “vision of things” (*A* 642). But his encounters with other authors are also creative, and a large part of his originality lies in showing how this happens. Powys’s thought is permanently affected by his perception of Wordsworth’s brooding relationship with the inanimate world; and by *Rabelais*’s enjoyment of the world of little children; and by Dostoevsky’s creation of a world with more than the usual dimensions. One can hardly discuss all these authors as objective influences on his work; rather, the insights which they afford become part of the drama of Powys’s own consciousness. His reading of favourite authors is sometimes idiosyncratic and minutely particular, but it always assumes in his mind a universal significance. He applies the same metaphor, that of “holding open the door” of an otherwise sealed-off universe, in different contexts to *Rabelais* (*R* 376-8), Wordsworth (*PL* 35-6), and Whitman (*VR* 214).

In his pluralistic outlook and in his claim to be pragmatic Powys borrows from William James, whom he often invokes as having “‘thickened out’ . . . the possibilities of life for me” (*A* 631). There is a pragmatic edge to his thought when he uses a variety of literary sources to suggest, or insist, that we live in a world of open possibilities. The benefit of literature, as Powys sees it, is that one can, in an “eclec-

tic and pragmatic” way, appropriate to oneself something of the “unique life-vision, the life-view” (*VR* vii) which is the property of the great classic authors, and thereby consciously modify one’s own imaginative approach to life. With considerable grace and irony, he makes allowances for different readers: not everyone can profit from the glacial scorn of Nietzsche, or even from the stubborn piety of Wordsworth.

*The Pleasures of Literature* alone shows an inordinate appetite for books; and Powys’s approach is the same to the world at large. Powys is, to use Richard Wollheim’s description of Adrian Stokes, “hungry for experience, and hungry also for the understanding of experience”.<sup>1</sup> Wollheim relates Stokes to Ruskin and Pater, arguing that in his autobiographical writings *Inside Out* (1947) and *Smooth and Rough* (1951) “we find representations, unexcelled in our literature, of the artist and the aesthete in the making”. Despite his insistence that “. . . to the bottom of my soul *I am no artist*” (*A* 403), Powys is connected with the same tradition, both in his treatment of Ruskin and Pater and in his own autobiographical development. The Cambridge syllabus of lectures on “Representative Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century”, which Powys prepared in 1902<sup>2</sup> has interesting notes on Ruskin and Pater, as well as on Lamb, De Quincey, Hazlitt and others. Collectively these writers, with their strong Wordsworthian affinities, form one of the main resources of Powys’s prose style. They help him to find language for the kinds of experience which concern him most deeply. His approach is thoroughly conscious and analytic when he is dealing with the enjoyment of the senses, the harvesting of impressions, the play of memory, and the role of the literary imagination in promoting these. In the *Autobiography* his dependence on phrases like “imaginative sensuality” (7) and “poetic continuity” (651) implies concentrated effort of this kind. The first aim is always “a vivid realization

of our own identity", as he says with reference to Hazlitt.<sup>3</sup>

It now seems curious how little confident Powys had felt about the realization of his own identity, and about the standard of culture he had achieved, when making those notes. Letters of that period show anxiety on the subject:

Subtract old Walt; squeeze Jesus out—vomit up Pater—fart out Hardy—wash your arm-pits of Keats, scrape the scurf of W. James out of your head, and blow the snot of Charles Lamb to the four winds—and what is left? (Montacute[Summer 1907])<sup>4</sup>

He felt his own creative expression blocked, his personality overwhelmed, when confronted by art: the idea of art, the arts in general, the great art of the past, but especially the art of the writers he most admired. He wrote from Florence:

I begin also to discover, as I try to see what really I do experience in regard to these various objects of art, how hopelessly bookish—how literary!—I am—every impression seems made up of sentences out of books. Have I no really definite personality, I ask myself . . .? [8 October 1909].<sup>5</sup>

Ironically he goes on to echo Pater and Whitman, acknowledging their influence, incongruous as they seem when put together, and mocking his own cultural pretensions.

Powys looks back on this phase of his development in the "Europe" chapter of the *Autobiography*. No less keenly than the autobiographical Adrian Stokes, he writes about culture as a need intimately related to one's personal experience. He recalls the inhibitions of his Florence and Venice days in a prose that redeems the occasion, confirms the experience as a whole. The writing is remarkable for its controlled subjectivity, and for the wide field of interest it creates. Reflections on sour white wine, most villainous constipation, and the good advice of Mr. Ford Madox Ford are swiftly displaced by references to Ruskin on Tintoretto, and Pater's incomparable essay on

the genius of Giorgione. Confiding remarks about the benefit of a spaghetti diet to a lacerated stomach substantiate other, more inward, realizations or fantasies about sunshine and shadow, marble steps and running water. These passages most fully represent his peculiar integrity in dealing with art and life. His embarrassment in relation to art is the potentially rich embarrassment of having to admit his own modest or immodest cravings, satisfactions and dissatisfactions, in all their imaginative and sensual detail. In everything he writes Powys claims a very large allowance for the involvement of his own feelings. Even in his criticism he gives the impression of being in direct communication with his own senses. His appreciation of the pleasures of literature seems all the more intense because of this. But Powys's enjoyment of art would not have the same intensity without the more vivid realization of his personal identity which the *Autobiography* represents.

"Authors are actors; books are theatres", according to Wallace Stevens ("Adagia" in *Opus Posthumous*). This would apply very strongly to Powys's *Autobiography*, and could be extended to the rest of his writings, all of which so closely anticipate or reflect the development it describes: the development of a particular type of imagination. Powys's self-realization was of course a kind of self-dramatization. In the *Autobiography* he repeatedly refers to himself as a born actor. His actual experience of the stage was that of a lecturer, and the literary essays are more or less directly the product of that experience. The ability to articulate his feelings about art, or rather to celebrate them for what they were, came only in the second half of his life, if we accept his well-known statement on this in the "Europe" chapter of the *Autobiography* (403). This is the period in which he became famous in America as a lecturer. He is not reticent about the effect the lectures were meant to have: ". . . my whole personality, every least movement I made, and every least sound I made, and every flicker, wrinkle,

and quiver of my face, became expressive of the particular subject I was interpreting" (A 449); ". . . I *became* that author" (A 527). His wish to identify with his subject clearly had harrowing dramatic potential and he was clearly prepared to exploit that potential for all it was worth, whether to harrow the audience deliberately, or perhaps relieve it of "some unspeakable mental load" (PL 655). Another comment epitomizes, to my mind, the extraordinary investment of personality: "I could become inanimate objects. I could feel myself into the lonely identity of a pier-post, of a tree-stump, of a monolith in a stone-circle; and when I did this I *looked* like this post, this stump, this stone" (A 528). The literary essays do embody this complex state of feeling. Their language enacts his involvement with Poe and "the close-clinging, heavily-scented cerements of the Dead" (VR 208); with Wordsworth and "the contortion of rigid endurance that binds animate and inanimate together, in the long travail of the world" (PL 349).

Powys's relation to the authors he treats comprises both genuine respect and violent appropriation. Language is used in both these ways in *Rabelais*, of all his literary studies the one in which he approaches the reader in the most deliberately personal way. It represents a highly individual way of reading *Rabelais* rather than an objective survey: one can't ignore or forget Powys for a moment, and what matters is what he makes of *Rabelais*. Even the passages translated from *Rabelais* are deeply coloured by Powys's own subjectivity, marked by his selective emphases. This is done with considerable tact and discretion: the commentary affords a great deal of pleasure; but if one is not interested in Powys it becomes unreadable. A very good example of Powys's skill in literary interpretation is the "Wordsworth" essay in *The Pleasures of Literature*: it shows both intensity and decorum; an ideal relationship between Powys and his subject. This kind of balance is rarely sustained so well, because Powys shows little interest in the idea of literary form. The essays themselves seem to reflect

the loose improvisation which was apparently his method of lecturing. There is no other framework.

Powys conscientiously refused to call himself an artist, and he rejected any view of art which placed it at an aesthetic distance from himself; involvement is his aim. Especially striking is his susceptibility to what Adrian Stokes terms "the invitation in art": the enveloping relationship, the tendency of art when it draws in the spectator rather than asserts its otherness and establishes an aesthetic and psychological distance. Powys reveals the same disposition in his fiction as in his interpretative writings. "You see I write the sort of book I like best to read" (June 3rd 1946).<sup>6</sup> Adrian Stokes's theory of two contrasting modes of art gives, I think, an insight into Powys's kind of creativity, and suggests the consistency of his procedure. Stokes distinguishes between "carving" and "modelling" as ways of dealing with the materials of art and with the world; these terms are intended to have a metaphorical rather than a strictly literal application. I believe that this account would make the author of *A Glastonbury Romance* a modeller rather than a carver. This is part of Wollheim's summary:

. . . in the last analysis, the 'modelled' work of art can be thought of as the mirror-image of the 'carved' work of art. Examine the characteristics of each, and we see that they are those of the other in reverse. So, in the 'carved' work of art there is a lack of any sharp internal differentiation: the individual forms are unemphatic, and the transitions between them are gradual: there is, to borrow the phrase in which Stokes described Piero's figures, a certain 'brotherliness' in the composition. And the reward for this is that the work of art as a whole asserts its distinctness or otherness from the spectator. By contrast, in the 'modelled' work of art, there are sharp transitions and considerable internal differentiation: the forms are distinct and individuated, they billow out from, or burrow their way into, the background, and in the overall composition, either the parts remain quite separate and their effect is cumulative, or else they are somewhat intemperately or

arbitrarily brought together by means of some overriding device. And the price that is paid for this is that the work of art as a whole tends to merge with or envelop the spectator.<sup>7</sup>

The sort of book Powys best likes to read, or to write, is one which makes a strong invitation, which envelops the reader in this way. Powys's aim is to merge with, identify with, project himself into, the work in question. He always values certain types of local intensity more highly than formal achievement for its own sake. He makes a good apologist for Wordsworth and Scott, but views Jane Austen's novels only as a kind of romance. He tends to be extremely partial and selective. He is indifferent to the work as a whole, as an achieved form. Primarily, literature offers an enlargement of personality; an opportunity to "loaf and invite my soul' in the presence of the boldest and briefest passages" (A 388), as Powys declares in one of his most deeply considered statements, using Whitman's famous phrase.

In *The Pleasures of Literature* Powys confesses that "Of course the essence of my own experiences must inevitably saturate a book like this" (7). Indeed, the excitement of these essays depends on the fact that his personality exhibits itself so powerfully. The price to be paid for this is that in reading them one endlessly fights Powys's old battles over again with him. Certain obsessions become apparent; curious

refinements of feeling in connexion with the erotic impulse, and sadism especially; elaborate arguments of a metaphysical and religious kind. Above all, he needs to affirm repeatedly that "The astronomical world is not all there is" (A 650; 652): this represents a main condition of the constant renewal of interest in life which his writings show. He uses the literary essays to dramatize his own relationship with the world, and his own basic convictions and feelings.

Having characterized Powys's imaginative disposition in this way, one can, I think, provide a positive answer to the question as to whether he can properly be called an artist. Powys himself raises this question only to dismiss it, and it may seem to have little relevance today. But it is exactly the question which T. S. Eliot raised about D. H. Lawrence. *After Strange Gods* shows that Eliot's complaint had to do not only with Lawrence's neglect of formal and traditional values, but with his failure to keep personality in its proper place, and his attempt to impose on his readers his own personal view of life. There should be a place in *After Strange Gods* for Powys to join Lawrence and Hardy. Those of Eliot's persuasion will deplore the display of personality and the conspicuous neglect of form in Powys's works. Others will find Powys's creative inspiration sufficiently stimulating to overcome such reservations, and not least so when he engages with classic literature.

#### Notes

My abbreviations within the text refer to the following London editions.

*A Autobiography*, 1934.

*MC The Meaning of Culture*, 1930.

*VR Visions and Revisions*, new ed., 1955.

*PL The Pleasures of Literature*, 2nd ed., 1946.

*R Rabelais*, 1948.

*SJ Suspended Judgements*, reprint ed., 1975.

<sup>1</sup>R. Wollheim, ed. *The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*, 1972, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>D. Langridge, *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement*, 1966, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>M. Elwin, ed. *Letters of John Cowper Powys to his Brother Llewelyn 1902-1925*, 1975, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>Louis Marlow, *Welsh Ambassadors*, 1971, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup>*Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, 1958, p. 207.

<sup>7</sup>*The Image in Form*, pp. 27-28.

See also *The Critical Works of Adrian Stokes*, ed. Lawrence Gowing, 3 vols., 1938. Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 1965, discusses Stokes's theory in relation to the poetry of Pound. Dennis Donoghue, *Thieves of Fire*, 1973, deals with the opposition between T. S. Eliot and a number of other authors, including Blake, Melville, Dostoevsky and D. H. Lawrence, and uses Stokes's distinction between "carving" and "modelling" to illustrate the argument; the whole discussion seems relevant to Powys's position.

# Jeremy Hooker

## T. F. Powys: "The Bass Note"

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And the whole wonder of our Mother appeared unto thee, and the vision came unto thee, and said, 'It is good.'

Through all time should this word of the Truth be remembered above all words. (*An Interpretation of Genesis, 2*)\*

The word is about the earth, "our Mother", and it is one of two closely associated words that must stand at the head of this paper, to name Powys's fundamental affirmation and so that they may go on echoing where my necessarily limited focus of attention might otherwise seem to deny them. The other word is "bless", addressed by Powys at the end of *Soliloquies of a Hermit* to Christian writers of the transition between "the broken flesh and rotten carcass of human despair" and "the New Heaven and the New Earth":

. . . let them bless the maiden and the young man that again loiter through the mead, for it is now evening, on their way home from the tavern; and let them bless the naughty child that lingered for one more solitary dance alone on the Green after all the others had gone. (154)

It is really himself whom he addresses. Powys is the writer of this transition, looking forward and back; learning how to reconcile the goodness of Creation with the existence of evil; learning how to bless.

### I

The Rev. Henry Neville is one of the two characters—the other is his spiritual brother, Henry Turnbull—with whom T. F. Powys thinks and feels in *Mr Tasker's Gods*. But even if this were not so, there would still be abundant reasons for knowing that the following passage voices

the author's intentions as well as his character's literary preferences:

Mr. Neville was not a great scholar, but he understood the soul of an author and he knew what he liked in a book: and that was the kind of deep note that Bunyan calls the ground of music, the bass note, that modern culture with its peculiar conceit always scoffs at. There was, besides this bass note, a certain flavour of style that he liked, a style that in no way danced in the air but preferred clay as a medium. (37-38)

The terms used here are not the currency of "modern culture with its peculiar conceit". But not all moderns exhibit this vice, and it is not Powys's celebrated irony alone that makes his mature art sophisticated in a distinctively modern way. This passage is itself more than the apprentice work of an artist who would become one of the most subtle modern stylists. Its central metaphor relates literature to music, a purer medium than language for intimating an order we may hear but cannot comprehend. Then "a certain flavour of style" returns us to the senses of smell and taste, and by emphasising their characteristic elusiveness, forms a link between metaphors that would otherwise contradict each other, when the tendency of music to dance in the air is brought down to earth by "clay as a medium", a singularly palpable natural material, tacky and malleable. Thus the passage does more than sketch large gestures; in an as yet incompletely mastered medium, it partially sounds the note and enacts the style of which it speaks. Given the artist's skill in deploying the religious

\*Page references in parentheses throughout the text all refer to the first editions of T. F. Powys's works.

associations of his metaphors, we do not ask how a writer can make music from clay. Similarly, it is Powys's subtle artistry that enables a great mystic, an apparent anachronism, to express his vision in the forms of modern English fiction.

Henry Neville is a priest. Priests are legion in the novels and stories of T. F. Powys, where the figure is as important as the magician is in John Cowper Powys's writings. Many are false priests, ranging from the mildly harmful, who may change for the better, to agents of the Devil. Others are presented affectionately and with approval. They are capable of love. They may have a simple faith in Christ and live in humility, or they may be sceptics or even heathens, with a large measure of kindness. In either case, they embody some or all of Powys's moral values. Some are ordained priests and some are not. All are, in one way or another, fools.

It is more difficult to know whether any of them is a true representative of God. Of Christ, yes: Mr. Hayhoe, for example, is certainly His representative, but Christ and God are rarely, if ever, one and the same in Powys's writings.

Powys is a moralist and a metaphysician. His morality and his metaphysics are, of course, related, and in any case I use the terms here for the sake of convenience; they must not obscure the fact that his art is their medium, a medium of revelation, which makes us see by delighting and moving us. But while his morality could be described, and is deep enough for Powys and simple enough for any one to live by, his apprehension of the Truth—the word he uses in *An Interpretation of Genesis* to avoid confusion with conventional images and ideas of God—is frequently reflected in his writings in ways that evade such nets as "immanence" and "transcendence", and even his own idea of conflict between Christ and the Father, and his apparently supernatural characters. Whereas John Cowper Powys creates a fictional multiverse to signify the multiverse, Theodore Powys creates a temporal world that opens on the limitless and the eternal. He uses his

imagination to illustrate and confess its limitations, leaving us and himself in darkness, with faith if we have it, but knowing that even darkness is a human image of the unknowable. I think this is the metaphysical dimension of the moral virtue of humility, exemplified by the worm in "The Blind Hen and the Earthworm":

'One of the first lessons that we are taught in our childhood is that of humility. We are told that we are nothing, and we are glad to believe it.'

'Surely that's easy,' said the hen, 'for a worm!'

'But 'tis with that nothing that God works,' replied the other. (*Fables*, 220)

In *Soliloquies of a Hermit* Powys calls himself a priest, and interprets the priestly nature with a dramatic variation and combination of passionate involvement and scepticism. Here, we are at once in a world of paradoxes, inversions or original interpretations of conventional word usages and ideas, affirmations, negations and re-statements of belief.

Am I a fool? Is not a fool the best title for a good priest? And I am a good priest. Though not of the Church, I am of the Church. Though not of the faith, I am of the faith. Though not of the fold, I am of the fold; . . . I am without a belief;—a belief is too easy a road to God. (1)

In this book, the idea that "a fool [is] the best title for a good priest" gives an unironical meaning to the word 'good' and marks a change of emphasis from *An Interpretation of Genesis*. There, only one kind of priest is said to exist, and he is false. His wish is to be "in the place of the Truth" and he interposes his falsehood between man and the Truth. In doing so for gain, he indulges in a particularly monstrous way the habit Powys sees all men as having: they make the object of their self-interest, desires and instincts a god, while even the good must necessarily conceive God within the limits of their understanding. "In man a false desire ever bringeth him a false

god", and man "createth his god like to himself".

This habit is deemed to be truly universal. In Powys's fiction all creatures, and the things he animates, devise a metaphysical system according to their natures and circumscribed by their limitations. For example, there is the mouse made homeless by Mark Only's plough:

A mouse had made its nest there, reasoning, no doubt, that land in that state could only have been intended by the creator of all things—to the mouse this creator was a rat—as permanent pasture. But the plough had turned over the little house, and the mouse became an infidel. (*Mark Only*, 27-28)

And each of Powys's characters—it is the basis of his characterization—is obsessed by an idea; each inhabits the lesser or greater circle, harmless or harmful to himself and others, of a consciousness turning round the god he has made. (I use the masculine pronoun because Powys's women and girls, though obsessed, should really be considered separately: they cannot be usefully sketched in these general terms.) This god may be a herd of pigs, or money, or lust, or "God", or something equally extraordinary, but whatever it is, it will denote the nature of its worshipper. "'Tis a world of wanting", says Mr. Bugby in *Innocent Birds*, (and he should know). Powys depicts a multitude of "wanters", many of whom, like Mr. Clowes in the story called "The Wanter" (*Captain Patch*), discover that man cannot possess anything, not even his coffin—"that we hold only in trust for the worms". God's gift of death is central to Powys's thought, not usually as a morbid preoccupation, but as the focus of his mysticism, the gate between all that man is, and the God whom he cannot conceive. Death is certainly absolute in the sense that man can imagine only in terms of his existence.

Powys uses his characters' gods to illustrate their moral, psychological and metaphysical implications and to create a wide range of comic and tragic effects. He is

a master both of pathos and of horror. He shows deep, sympathetic insight into madness and he does not measure sanity as the world does. With regard to the likes of Mr. Bugby and Mrs. Vosper, he conveys a lively sense of diabolic possession by the gods of their nature. God and the gods are all destroyers. Though there are times when, for my taste, he overplays comic absurdity, he always seems to have a reason for doing so. In *Innocent Birds* Mr. Pim, though a father, is for ever looking for someone to tell him how children are made. I find this tiresome, yet, as Powys observes, procreation is a mystery . . . *The Dewpond* shows movingly and subtly the consequences of Mr. Gasser's deification of his credulity. In *God*, little Johnnie Chew takes his father's hat to be God.

This story exemplifies Powys's mature art and his psychological and metaphysical subtlety. We listen respectfully to the thoughts of John Chew.

Everywhere, where a man believes God is, there He is. God is no respecter of holy places; a mouse-hole may be heaven. There is nothing so small or so common that may not contain the whole of the Godhead. God is in no church or state; He is exactly and truly where the most simple think He is. (*The Two Thieves*, 159)

The word is surely Powys's as well as John Chew's. Is it his last word on the subject? It may be. The hat is indeed the true provider, when, "sacrificed", it discloses the money John's father has concealed in its lining. Is there any reason why a comically absurd fictional ending should not confirm a spiritual truth? The story may itself be just such a mouse-hole as that mentioned above, providing we are not too wise to its folly. Or we may conclude, as some do, that Powys was himself a sceptic. On the evidence of my readings I think otherwise: the darkness, though absolute, is everywhere too numinous for him to be fixed even in such a belief. He is gentle with his simple characters' faith, and fool enough not to be cunningly dogmatic, by depicting faith as

an exclusively psychological phenomenon filling its objects with itself.

Yet "a belief is too easy a road to God". Belief beats the highway and leads to the images of "child man", as Powys calls him in *An Interpretation of Genesis*—and all his characters are either child man or projections of child man's imagination. Not all of these images are false, not by any means, as *God* for example shows. But the priest who is without a belief is correspondingly more open to "the mystic fear". The good priest is a fool because he does not reason in the way most men do, from themselves to God, but attempts to know himself and others as moved by God:

Man is a collection of atoms through which pass the moods of God—a terrible clay picture, tragic, frail, drunken, but always deep rooted in the earth, always with claws holding on to his life while the moods pass over him and change his face and his life every moment. The people of the earth are clay pieces that the moods of God kindle into life. (*Soliloquies of a Hermit*, 9-10)

It is, of course, impossible to see man as God sees him, while the great mystics, when uttering their apprehension of God, attempt to transcend language, and frequently use, as Powys does, images and symbols of light and darkness, fire and water, and speak paradoxically of death as life. But Powys is the good priest as artist, whose priestly duty is "to dig in the clay through which the moods of God pass" and to "foretell how the clay pieces will behave when the mystic winds blow through them", and whose artistic duty is to make the clay pieces. His thought is Biblical yet also originally interpretative, viewing the Bible as our greatest "story-book", or series of "pictures", of figures moved by mystic winds that no words can trap. He is himself accordingly a maker of pictures. As novelist he makes a world with words; as good priest he makes it picture a reality beyond words. He attempts what to the rational mind seems impossible—like sounding the bass note with clay as a medium.

## II

. . . new life ever wrestleth with the old and obtaineth life therefrom. Jacob wrestled with the genius of his forefathers and forced a blessing from that genius. We likewise have our forefathers in us, and we carry their burdens. With a great wrestling must we wrestle with them and force a blessing from them. (*An Interpretation of Genesis*, 74-75)

Blessings received in living with a sense of the holy, and given again in his art—this is the act of Powys's maturity, but it was not made possible except by a prolonged and painful struggle of the kind described here. He was one in whom the dominant consciousness of a materialistic and conventionally pious age broke. He wrestled with the Bible, with writers in the mystical tradition, and it is clear to me that he went back to these, not only because of his upbringing and inclinations, but because the Church's orthodox ideas and its accommodation to an unjust and repressive society broke in him, while the new thought to which he was open, together with the fact of the Great War—and it is surely significant that his first novels, with their sense of savage cruelty and destructiveness, were written then—cast all into doubt, smashing conventional images of man, nature and God. His harsh satire on the ecclesiastical establishment recalls Hardy, but in his struggle partly to find and partly to create alternatives to the dominant order of thought and belief in his outward-looking society, he is more akin to Lawrence. Fabulous as his creations are, we should not overlook either his specific, damaging critique of English society or the alternatives he offers to the prevalent materialistic and idealistic modes of Western thought.

To Powys, man is again a mystery, broken out of his shell of customary concepts. He apprehends him in his early novels as deeply and unconsciously involved with the mysteries of God and Nature. In consequence *Black Bryony* is as it were his *Rodmoor*. It is a novel in which thought and technique are inchoate, and the con-

nections between nature, sex, religion, and sin rather confusing and morbid; yet it is interesting, too, both for what it partially achieves, and for its disclosure of conflicts which are less visible in his mature art because it largely reconciles them. In the first three novels in particular (which belong together, though *Mark Only*, a fine novel, is mature Powys artistically if not in vision), the characters are lived by a terrible force which the good may control in themselves but which the others do not even try to, thus maliciously destroying the good, and in some cases blindly destroying themselves as well. Self-destruction, most often by drowning, is however a dominant theme of Powys's mature work, developing in relation to his death mysticism and his treatment of obsessions. In the depths of their imaginations, there are fascinating differences and affinities between Theodore and John Cowper Powys.

This terrible force, which Henry Neville's Christ suffers with man, Powys sometimes calls "God". This is "the Ancient of Days" which possesses the tramp in *Mr Tasker's Gods*, "the monster from below, the immortal beginning and ending of man's nature, . . . even the everlasting mud". In *Soliloquies of a Hermit* Christ is "the stranger upon earth, He who was not afraid to call the terrible moods "Father", to take them into His life, to bear with them, to love them". He dared "to fall before His Father's terrible mood of blind rage working in men". Though Powys's conception of this God is not, and could not be, wholly consistent and clear, he evidently felt Him, and found Him truly a savage God. The mellowness of the later novels, beginning with *Mockery Gap*, is then due in part to his ability to hold the balance between love and terror, or almost to resolve the conflict. He even comes to play with the idea of God.

*Mockery Gap* effects a partial resolution in a symbolic form, where the fisherman, a Christ-figure with his net of love, is the only character to live in harmony with the sea, as if he has learned to call the sea, focus of the fears of all and the longings of some,

destroyer of all that man is, "Father". *Kindness in a Corner* is Powys's kindest novel partly because it virtually identifies Christ with God. Mr. Turtle, however, thinks otherwise:

'Is there no way, then, to rid yourselves of your fear of death?' asked Mr. Dottery. 'Cannot you trust in God?'

'Tain't wise to put one's trust in a murderer,' replied Mr. Turtle. (211)

The effect is comic, without suggesting either the nerve of cruelty in God, man and nature associated with this idea in the earlier work, or any sense of a tired, death-wishing, repentant God-figure such as we find in *The Only Penitent* and *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. *Kindness in a Corner* also contains, together with the finest dramatic meditations on death in Powys's writings, the following noble and witty passage, uniting Christ and God:

God is still a carpenter. It was not for nothing that He was received into the family of Joseph. He can dovetail events, He can measure time, He can cut out a plank, so that it exactly fits the roof where He wishes it to go. He can do more than that. He can turn sawdust into bread. He can take a rude and knotty log—such as John Bunyan was—and plane him away until He gets a smooth surface to write His will upon, yet is able to leave the hard knots below, for He was never one to spoil by Art the rough matter of Nature. God knows how to use a jack-plane. (140)

Far from ever mocking Christ, Powys devotes some of the most lyrical passages in his writings, notably in *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, to celebrating Him. Powys is like Mr. Vardy in *God*: there are two things he never makes fun of—"poverty and love". But like Mr. Vardy he will "even poke fun at death in a sly manner" and in his mature work he is one whom "the thought of God often amuses". Indeed Mr. Vardy believes that God "wishes to look a little silly at times just to make them [his children] laugh".

'The true God,' Mr. Vardy used to observe, 'must be a very foolish fellow, and as

simple as any silk hat. He would gladly cover the heads of all mankind with His blessings, only none will permit Him to do so, for men only wish to make God as proud as themselves, and as righteous. The fools!" said Mr. Vardy. "What do they know about God?" (*The Two Thieves*, 157)

In *Soliloquies of a Hermit* Powys writes, "I do not object to any kind of story . . . but it must be something with a soul. If it be a story, let it have a touch of human blood about it; what I want is a real mind's battleground, with sweat and agony". His early novels are such a battleground, but his later ones are his playground, where humour and seriousness are indivisible.

*Mr Weston's Good Wine* is a comic masterpiece, with humour that is alternately broad and gentle, whimsical and subtly ironic. It is also a measured, beautiful and melancholy meditation on transience and death; a lyrical celebration of love and a terrible judgement on those who would destroy its erotic innocence; a satire, alternately loving and savage, on human follies. But above all it is an affectionate but disquieting comedy of man's traditional personification of God. This makes it quite different as allegory—if that is what it is—from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, where Bunyan's meanings are easy to decipher because his doctrine is unequivocal, and different again from a work like *Paradise Lost* which attempts a portrait of God as He is.

Who, after all, is Mr. Weston? First, a character in a novel, the one who, together with his creator, most frequently reflects on the nature and power of art, and who says that it is wrong to be "so firm a believer in the Bible" as Cowper was, "for no poet should ever believe the words of another, however true he may think his own". He is himself an author, with an author's vanity. His name is borrowed from *Emma*, from no knightly hero, but from a jovial, decent, limited fellow. So as author of the Bible and of Creation, he is still T. F. Powys's tribute to Jane Austen. His literariness as both character and fictional writer is em-

phasised, recalling John Cowper Powys's technique of calling attention in his fictions to their fictional nature, and hence to the destructive and creative power of imagination. Once again, but here in a consummate form, Powys is making wonderful comedy from traditional images of God deriving from the Bible and our childish pictures. Mr. Weston had, as he tells Tamar, to leave "much of the truth" out of his book in conforming to "a capricious and ignorant public". He is conscious of having sinned against true art. Powys on the other hand has necessarily to omit much of the truth, for he is a simple and foolish man who does not pretend to know it. Instead, he pictures the limits of imagination, thus both pointing to the unknowable reality and showing the humility in which man acknowledges himself a creature, incapable of knowing his supreme Creator. There is, however, a knowable supreme reality—Christ's spirit—and I suggest that this is the true hero of the novel, working through Luke Bird and others, but above all, through the supernatural wine merchant's repentance.

### III

Almost every passage in Powys's mature writings repays the closest attention. I have chosen to look at extracts from a short chapter of *Mockery Gap*, both because this novel is curiously still generally undervalued, and for reasons that should become obvious.

Chapter 4, "A Warning", begins:

The hill, or Mockery cliff as it was usually called by those who lived near, might have smiled, could a hill smile, at the fine visitors who had peopled it and then departed, leaving only their wheel-marks, and a scented handkerchief dropped by Miss Ogle, behind them. (33)

The anthropocentric view of the hill is immediately qualified by juxtaposing it with clauses indicating the hill as it is. The former view is given by the naming of the hill—"Mockery cliff as it was usually called

by those who lived near"—and the fancy that it can be personified—"might have smiled, could a hill smile". The author himself personifies the hill, but in the perspective given by a way of seeing that sets man against land and sea, not land and sea in the fanciful and self-centred view of man. The tokens left by "the fine visitors" bespeak their alien and insignificant presence, and make "fine" ironical.

We are next shown the village below, where "the land and the cottages grow into one another" and buildings may be seen "if carefully looked down upon". These include the vicarage and church which "had settled meekly in the folds of the valley as hardly to be noticed, and even when seen they only appeared to point to Mr. Pink's stone house that stood by the church lane, and to say that 'it shouldn't have been there'". Hardly noticeable even on this portion of the earth, the ecclesiastical buildings are related ironically to Mr. Pink, a truly meek man, of whom orthodox religion disapproves, thus making the word "meekly" applied to them signify hypocrisy.

The next three brief paragraphs use a light but subtle irony to place man and his faith in the context of the cliff's geological movement inland from the sea, in "one of God's moments". Powys continues his personification of the hill in a way that detaches it from man's measurements of time and the world around him in terms of his own assumed centrality. Then the tone deepens:

The mere daytime of prettiness departed with the town visitors, and now that they were gone the true look of the land, that had been hidden from them, came forth again to be seen by those who have eyes to see. The blind-cow rock, that alone of all natural objects had never been beguiled by the sunbeams into looking pretty, now took upon it as the sun declined, giving the true bass note to the colours of the evening, the blackness of despair. The blind cow now began to spread out her influence further than herself, the waves that struck the rock became intense and living. Its dead state, as the abodes of the

dead will sometimes do, reached out hands to form, to grave, and to portray, and to cast over Mockery the feelings and the fears of the night.

Clouds that earlier in the day had been but shining vapour, now became real and yet more real and grew sensibly darker. The cliff, the fields below, the church that waited for the night, even the tiny shining of the little water-brooks, were beginning to express the supreme loveliness of lonely silence—of the beauty that dies.

Shadows, born of the shadow of the blind cow, began to creep here and there like monstrous toads and thick vipers. The shadows became more and more monstrous as the sun dropped, while some amongst them now showed a likeness to him that is called Man, a dweller upon the earth.

And now the sea, more than any other emanation of eternal truth, changed its face. The sea darkened, the dainty spaces above the waters where the light was began to take up the shadows of the deep and to wear them as a garment, while the tumulus upon the cliff watched as if glad that the evening was come. (34-35)

The passage immediately recalls Hardy's personification of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, by which he conveys both its utterly non-human character and its accordance in certain moods with man's nature, as he interprets it. There is more than recollection, there is overwhelming evidence of strong influence. And Theodore Powys, like John Cowper, was influenced by more than Hardy's evocations of the mystery of nature. But here, as elsewhere, what we see is not an imitation of Hardy but a passage that, though bearing the marks of his influence, is in itself and in context distinctively Theodorian.

Powys sounds the bass note here even as he names it, relating it to "the blackness of despair". But despair is too limiting to express all that he evokes, as, with a change of cadence, colour and tone, and using natural objects and elements with their Biblical associations, he shows us time in a God-like perspective and reaches down to the ground of these forms of rock and sea, darkness and light. This is "the true look of

the land . . . to be seen by those who have eyes to see". The chapter as a whole illustrates different ways of seeing and the importance of having eyes to see the true look, not of the land alone, but of "Man, a dweller upon the earth", who is subject to time and natural processes, not their master. Yet the central elemental symbol is the blind-cow rock. This might be taken to intimate the blindness of the First Cause, a blindness giving rise to despair in one who perceives it, and therefore the perishing nature of himself and of all things. He might be thought to perceive despair as man's element, arising from the blind and obdurate ground of the flux of being. I do not myself think that it does intimate this. Powys is certainly profoundly conscious of time and hyper-sensitive to its manifestations and its effects on nature and man, and some of his finest passages, especially in *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, *Innocent Birds* and *Fables*, are lyrical and melancholy concentrations of the seasonal cycle in a measured flight of images, and of man's life, fleeting as a shadow. Yet time is for him a mystery which he almost always presents as partially concealing and partially revealing a deeper mystery. As here, when the sea washing about the "dead state" of the blind-cow rock which makes its waves "intense and living", intimates eternity, while death, which has the same effect on life, cannot see the element in which it stands.

Powys personifies these things no less than Miss Ogle does, whose name describes her way of looking; but his personifications carry his melancholy and dread, expressing the vision of one who knows despair, "lonely silence", "the beauty that dies", the relation of life—imaged as being beautiful, delicate, monstrous, precarious—to death; who sees Man as a shadow deeply implicated in these, a shadow who can be monstrous and is not essentially what he conceives himself to be, but subject to "the feelings and the fears of the night". It is a mystic's vision, conveyed poetically, and despite the interpretation I have offered, no complete or wholly rational philosophy can

be abstracted from it. The passage invokes "eternal truth" without reducing it to an impossibly neat or logical meaning. Perhaps the closest we can come to saying in other words what Powys sounds and shows is to quote another, equally irreducible passage:

And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven. (*Genesis XXVIII. 17*)

Yet in citing this, we have also to bear in mind another passage, which I shall quote later, concerning "the golden gate of the grave".

The chapter then returns from Man seen against this background to characters in the novel, and from the bass note to comedy which echoes its significance. The characters are thought of by the spirit of an ancient king hovering about the tumulus. One is a meddlesome know-all, for whom the spirit has no love; another is a greedy farmer who aims to dig for treasure in the tumulus. Another is a comic simplification of Powys himself.

This is Mr. Caddy, whose name, perhaps not accidentally, recalls by association the words quoted by Sylvia Townsend Warner (included in the extract from her work published in Kenneth Hopkins's *The Powys Brothers*), from an incident when Violet Powys "broke into one of Theo's bouts of dilly-dallying with the exclamation: 'Oh, get along with you, you old tea-pot!'" But whether this recollection is relevant or not, Mr. Caddy is certainly one of Powys's amusing self-caricatures. He tells stories, "all of which contained night-time or, as Mr. Caddy would have said, bedtime matters". And he would sometimes "mention his betters".

'They do say,' Mr. Caddy had been heard to remark, 'that wold God be everywhere—but 'E bain't where I be, and that I do know. Parson do a-preach of, an' even Mr. Pink 'ave a-named 'E; and some do tell that 'twere God who made the wide roaring sea, and the more fool 'E to make en,

so I do say. But I do believe,' and here Mr. Caddy would wink slyly, 'that 'E did a-make each pretty maiden.' (36)

Thus the chapter moves from the departure of its characters leaving the land and man's presence there to be seen as they are, to a God-like view of man and the elements in time, back to the novel's characters, including a gently self-mocking portrait of the writer who has created this movement. The "warning" is of the spirit's enmity to the greedy farmer, but it is universal too. As Powys frequently says or shows, "we all feel so safe in the world", but—"How dreadful is this place!"

Humour and humilitude are closely associated in Powys, for with humour he mocks himself and his designs, and takes us from the sublime to the ridiculous and back again, each being equally a way of resigning himself and his fictions to that which is beyond them, unknowable and unimaginable:

And then as the light of day wanes and the darkness gathers, and we behold the far reaches of the deep, we are led to contemplate the grand vista of eternity. Then the dark waters gather tumultuously about the golden gate of the grave, behind which stands the Name, spoken with holy dread by all generations of mankind.

Spoken with awe unfathomable. For whatever we may think of the injustice, the cruelty, the pain here upon earth, the Name, and the terror and love of it that hides so silent behind the tomb, must for ever hide, too, the ultimate truth. God, for ever and everlasting, life without end—God.

(*Mockery Gap*, 182)

The sea as a symbol of eternity we may be able to fathom, but not the awe that knows how dumb are its own finest symbols to utter the reality behind the Name. The silence of Mr. Dottery, in *Kindness in a Corner*, may be the only possible answer to the question Mr. Turtle asks about eternity: "And what be that?" It is, however, silence named in a novel, and for Powys his mature art is both a sounding of and a playing upon the surface of a mystery which is not art, but which art may make us aware of.

We fancy ourselves as wise as the old gentleman who holds up his hand and points to heaven and its amusements that await the good.

We hold out our hands too and show the world Mockery Gap, and point out that there are pretty pebbles to pick up along the sea-shore.

Pebbles, that from the point of view of the Author of all things—and bow to Him we had better, or we may rue the omission—may as well be looked at as anything else that He has made. All life is but a looking, so why not stare at Mr. Roddy? (83)

Or, we might add, Mr. Weston, or Tinker Jar, or even wise sexton Truggin. For all are the "pretty pebbles" made by their great author from the clay of which he is himself made. Or "a picture" which, as Mr. Solly thinks of the passage of time, "can show a vaster and a grander one behind it". Powys's art is one great picture with many scenes, many tragic figures and more comic ones, which makes us see what we cannot see, and feel the source of terror and love: "God, for ever and everlasting, life without end—God".

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# Ian Hamilton

## T. F. Powys and the Bible

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### I

In *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* when the protagonist says to his companion, "I trust you are not one of those who place nature before art" (46),<sup>1</sup> the enquiry is not as simple and inconsequential as it may seem, not merely a ruse by Weston to persuade Michael to listen to a chapter of his work. The art that Weston speaks of is in fact the real life experienced by all humans, the life that he has played some part in creating. A substantial section of the imagery associated with Weston in the novel seeks to explain life in terms of fiction—the fiction of God, Weston himself:

Mr Weston had once written a prose poem that he had divided into many books, and was naturally surprised when he discovered that the very persons and places that he had but seen in fancy had a real existence in fact.

And that prose poem written in far-off days, the book Weston carries in his van telling him all about his customers, is the Bible. That book is at one and the same time the most important work of fiction for Powys and the most comprehensive account of reality. It is the pattern for all life and at the core of all his writing.

It is very clear from his life and works that Powys reveres the ancient in all things, and he follows the advice of the *Lao Tzu*, a book with whose philosophy Powys's has many affinities. "Let your wheels move only along old ruts".<sup>2</sup> His better characters, those who have rejected the God of the immortal mood, are not carried away by the emptiness, the rushing from "nothingness into nothing"<sup>2</sup> of modern life. They adhere to the simple life which is the deeper life, as it is called in *Soliloquies of a Hermit*.

There is diffuse but powerful innuendo of dislike for the new in Powys's foreword to Sylvia Townsend Warner's *A Moral Ending and Other Stories*. This becomes explicit in a tale like *A Loud Lie*, where one of the standards Mr Crumpter requires of the wholesalers who supply his shop with groceries is a good name gained by age. In *Mr. Tapper and the Tree*, age in the ash tree is synonymous with wisdom. On the contrary, modern life is replete with evil emanating from human nature. This is not to say that in the past things have been any different; all things old are not necessarily good. Love of age merely for its own sake is specious; that is one of the dominant ideas in *A Loud Lie*. Crumpter may value what has been proved and mellowed by the years, but his search for a father-figure to give him respectability in a junk shop is both pointless and absurd. As Powys says in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*; "But now, in these latter days, the hum of an automobile had taken the place—for all human things change—of the trotting of a horse" (100). Newness cannot be discarded completely, just as antiquity cannot be praised without reservations. The originality of Powys's own work has been justifiably stressed. This quality is *not* divorced from the past: Powys unites tradition and newness in the way T. S. Eliot claimed a great writer should.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the fascination and much of the significance of T. F. Powys come from the combination in him of what we may call broadly his religious inheritance with an (equally broadly termed) modern outlook.<sup>5</sup>

Powys is innovative within the context of what is most sure and certain in the past:

the *Lao Tzu* again. "Woe to him who wilfully innovates/While ignorant of the constant".<sup>6</sup>

The constant for Powys to a large extent is the pattern laid down in the Bible. As Mr Weston finds out when he opens his book on the hill, there are few types of people, but those types are eternal.<sup>7</sup> Life is ever-recurrent: in *Soliloquies of a Hermit* he talks of "The memories of spring—that every spring revives, and every autumn kills, and every winter buries!" (18). This is reminiscent of the idea of the cycle of life in Eliot's poetry. Not that pessimism and tiredness (which causes F. R. Leavis to contrast the two writers),<sup>8</sup> in *The Fragment of Agon* and *The Waste Land*, but rather the account in the first section of *East Coker* which seems to echo Powys's sentiments. One of the complaints of *The Waste Land* concerns the breaking of the link between past and present. This again is comparable with Powys's dislike for the decadence of modernity; and for him, the more honest, older ways of life continued in the present are eternal, and are true for all ages: "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3, 8).

This timelessness is demonstrated in the arrival of Weston in Folly Down. His recreation of summer in the valley illustrates "The point of intersection of the timeless/With time",<sup>9</sup> and links by its very nature the modern world of the village with the creation of the world, and the Incarnation (indeed, with the eternity of God). The same imagination responsible for these two events—God's—is also behind the writing of the Bible:

Mr Weston had once written a prose poem that he had divided into many books, and was naturally surprised when he discovered that the very persons and places that he had but seen in fancy had a real existence in fact. The power of art is magnificent.<sup>10</sup>

There is significantly an ambiguity here as to whether Powys *is* talking of the Bible or of life itself; and the difference is

negligible in practical terms, for the Bible is the record of all that is permanent in life, the timeless in the lives of each mortal.

Clearly from this passage alone, the writing of the Bible is attributed to God. But historically speaking it was man who wrote it: "Moses", Isaiah, Paul and so on. The question is whether their writings for Powys were the inspiration of God, or whether they were recorders of the "moods of God", feelings and inclinations common to the majority of people. The Lawgiver of Israel continually refers to "the poets" in *An Interpretation of Genesis*, those from whose work Genesis was compiled. The Bible is thereby seen as the literature of life, the literature which comes from the people, and tells of the whole of man's experience. It synthesized in its own terms contemporary religious experience.<sup>11</sup>

In *Soliloquies of a Hermit* there is a passage on Powys's opinions on the Bible.<sup>12</sup> For him "the Bible tells us all we can ever know about ourselves"; its tales are not observation, but come from experience and involvement: "Everything that we do and think under the moods is put into the Bible". The poetry of the Bible and the poetry of our lives are one and the same: "it is true, because it is true to life and true to man." As Louis Wilkinson records, "to Theodore, the Bible is about the inhabitants of East Chaldon".<sup>13</sup> Life is always repeating itself, always new. The life the Bible tells of is the life that Mr Priddle of *When Thou Wast Naked* sees and experiences in his job in the coal office. The manners of the people encountered there correspond exactly with what he reads in the Bible, "though their names were a little altered in the book" (39).

The main characters of that story take part "in the play that Mr Priddle knew recurred eternally" (54), and the same is true for all. The common folk possess a wisdom which accepts the whole process of life recorded in the Bible.

'Poor Fan did live young once,' said Truggin, 'an' now poor Fan do die old.'  
'Tis in Bible,' remarked Trunks . . .<sup>14</sup>

The Good Book has relevance for all even if it is not understood by all: the inhabitants of Tadnol in *Feed My Swine* for instance. In that tale Mr Toole finds a better use for it than merely reading it. "It's all been used for they taps,' he said, 'for who don't know that paper must be put round a tap before 'tis hammered into barrels?'" (6).

For Nicholas Grobe the Bible, although his comfort and joy in life, does not explain all of life, and it is replaced finally by the wine of Mr Weston. The love that that embodies is finally better than the Bible; the image of Grobe's own empty bottle a little earlier which he puts beside the Bible shows how it has failed finally to fulfil him. Weston's wine takes its place, while at the same time it affirms the connexion between the love of God and the Bible. "Perhaps . . . Mr Weston has taken my Bible and left his wine—a very good exchange!"<sup>15</sup>

This suggestion of the incompleteness of the Bible is common in Powys, just one feature of the irony bred by an upbringing the Church. Weston accepts three suggestions for improvement of his book in *Mr Weston's Good Wine* all of which are appropriate to the life depicted in this book. Kiddle suggests the "Sons of Levi" might better be called "Sons of Grunter"; Grunter himself suggests the phrase "a sinner be the true saviour of mankind", and Luke Bird amends the end of Psalm 104 read to him by Weston.<sup>16</sup> This is not contradictory but makes sense as the Bible being the account of all life for all time—(Weston, God, says it is about himself)—can never be truly said to be complete.

The Bible as we have it is not the outline of what we should be, but of what we are, and therefore fails to be complete from a moral standpoint. Evil constantly crops up in Powys as a result of the words of the Bible. By following the example in Joshua brought to her notice by Reverend Francis Hayhoe, Daisy Huddy in *Unclay* displays a scarlet thread, so advertising her trade; and in *Jesus Walk* the biblical words of Christ only lead to a getter getting more. The detection of evil in the Bible though, needs

to come largely from an evil mind: Miss Pettifer sees Mr Tucker's Bible as a book of obscenities.

The incompleteness of the Bible—Mr Weston admits that he was "compelled to leave out much of the truth"<sup>17</sup>—is not too drastic a shortcoming. According to *Kindness in a Corner*, "though many a censor has been busy, nothing has really been left out; all that has happened may be read of somewhere" (149). This is one of the justifications that Powys might make of using other authors, but it also implies that any book might serve to reflect mankind as well as the scriptures (so long as it reflects life from a reasonable standpoint). For Solly (*Innocent Birds*) *A History of America* by R. Mackenzie governs and directs his life, and Hayhoe replaces the Bible in *Unclay* by the works of Jane Austen.

The Bible is true in spirit, as are Powys's works, to mankind in general; but when we claim that the Bible is at the basis of all Powys's work, it is his interpretation of it upon which the work is founded. His different characters find different ways of substantiating from the Bible what they wish to believe: "There were numerous . . . instances that Mr Crossley culled from the Bible, all going to prove the necessity of a medium between God and man".<sup>18</sup> Neither we nor Powys accept this idea as truth; but Powys's idea of the Truth (as it is bound to be) is just as selective.

The very basis of any appreciation of *An Interpretation of Genesis*, as the title suggests, depends on allowing for the author's interpretation. As one reviewer pointed out, there is no apology for the approach to Genesis, which for Powys enshrines permanent truths and rejects the rest.<sup>19</sup> Genesis was written "when man was still in the firm grip of elder man",<sup>20</sup> that is predominantly evil, and so the reader must extract from it the "darkness" and discard it. This rules out a fair proportion of the original, and of what is left, much is seen by Powys as metaphor. The flood for instance indicates the spiritual death of all save Noah and his family; the waters are the

waters of darkness which reappear in the *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, and which are a sign of modern times. Justification for free interpretation arises from the principle that all is from the pens of poets, as fallible as any other human beings.

The most obvious fresh interpretation of the Bible by Powys concerns the doctrine of immortality. What generations of conventional Christians have taken as literal truth backed up by such verses as John 3, 16 and Romans 6, 23, is turned completely on its head. The desire for it belongs to the immortal mood. Men give up the more obvious getting ways because Heaven is the ultimate thing to be gained.

. . . and they soon began to think that His Heaven was a shadow in the water, a large shadow of that hunk of meat that they with their dog-like teeth held in their half-opened mouths.<sup>21</sup>

This general method of interpretation, although it always runs the risk of being called eccentric, is further legitimated. The poem *Pearl* demonstrates the encouragement that the medieval church gave to new interpretations of biblical stories. It seems to be in that trend that Powys plays the Devil in quoting scripture to his own ends.

The value of Powys's interpretation is justified by emphases of the Bible; the absolute importance to him of the Christian ethic of love underlies all of his best work.

Many of the short stories are so conventional as to be compared, as Murphy points out, with medieval doctrine.<sup>22</sup> But just as often, a conventional understanding of the Bible is used as a foil for Powys's own ideas. There is continual surprise at the discrepancies between what Powys says and the way convention is used to express it. Use of individual words, like "immortality" for instance, tend to shock when it is understood what Powys really means by them. The very use of the word makes the reader more attentive to what is being said.

On another plane, the conventional understanding of a phrase is sometimes used

by Powys for the associations it bears. The last thing to be associated with Ward's understanding of Powys's God, for example, is peace; and yet the phrase "the peace of God", which descends on Miss Gibbs by the sea-shore (*The Seaweed and the Cuckoo Clock*), carries with it overtones of deep content.

Often convention is used for humorous intent. The appearances of God in the stories give enough scope for humorous ironies and comment, and Powys has no fear about undermining the seriousness perhaps appropriate to his subject. There is the comical interlude in *God* when Johnny mentions that God might well be made manifest in a top hat, if He has been already in the burning bush and the opponent with whom Jacob wrestled. Elsewhere the Bible has the reputation of heaviness and lack of interest with which it is often associated. In *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, it is only with the greatest effort that Weston finds an audience for a chapter from his work in Luke; all the others he invites to listen for a while are far from interested.

The Bible may be the cause for some humour in Powys, but it is as serious for him in terms of his art as it is for life itself. The very language that Powys uses is biblical in origin; but the control and ease of the moral tone and biblical cadences in works like *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and *Fables* grew out of a language that was far closer to the Bible, and far less effective. *An Interpretation of Genesis* is the only published work in this early style. Almost any part of it can be taken as an example of a style which hinders Powys's ideas (which are possibly worth more attention than they have been given). That this extract from the account of Noah contains a verse from the Bible which fits in so easily verbatim into the narrative shows how close Powys is to the language of the Authorized Version.

The dove is the poet, and the poet found no rest for the sole of his foot, so he returned unto man, and man 'put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the

ark.' And the poet came back again unto man and lied not unto him.<sup>23</sup>

Such language quickly becomes tedious; and yet it seems that this style Powys tried to cultivate in normal life, even if it cannot have been natural to him.

The babes reward all one's labour, every night time one feels the reward, the feeling of the Father that increaseth, that taketh away from the self and giveth to the child. Speak I too piously? Where is beauty that liveth and fadeth not? Speak, o wise one.<sup>24</sup>

However, in all of the fiction, apart perhaps from parts of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* which are stilted (a remnant of the immediate expression of ideas in the two earlier books rather than their style), the use of biblical language is far more accomplished. The Authorized Version when first it appeared had something to say and said it. This lucidity, a feature of Powys's style to the point of simplicity,<sup>25</sup> is combined with the mystery evoked by the biblical terminology, archaic to some extent when first written, in Powys's style. One of the first concerns of the Bible translators must have been communication, especially to common folk; and Powys mixes his biblical terms with dialect. The language of the common folk is plainly a local one, but it is stylized by Powys in so far as the shape of their sentences is the same as the more plainly biblical style, and also incorporates biblical phrases.<sup>26</sup> That style is evident time after time; it acts to justify the actions of Spurdle at the end of *The Hassock and the Psalter*, even though there is no justification for his saving the Psalter in the terms of the tale: "But the hassock, that was worn and only stuffed with straw, he carried out of the church and cast upon the fire". (262)

At other times Powys adds little archaic touches perhaps to deepen the effect of a passage, as when Mr Bottle in *Bottle's Path* looks out to sea, filled with melancholy, his life's work over.

It sometimes happened, when Mr. Bottle stood upon those high cliffs, that the setting

sun would make a bright pathway of silver that extended all across the sea, but alas! when darkness came, the path would fade and perish and the light upon it pass away, like a fond hope that tarrieth but an hour.<sup>27</sup>

However, as in the earlier parts of *Make Thyself Many*, when such tones of conscious grandeur are used, and in contrast with *Interpretation*, irony is never very far away.

The language of the prayer book is also an integral part of the style—Dottery "had done, he knew, sometimes what he should not have done, and at other times had omitted to do what he ought".<sup>28</sup> (The modification of the words suggests sincerity.) There are also constant allusions to areas of general moral consideration. The broad way that leadeth to destruction in Powys is often seen as the well-gravelled drive-way of the rich; and the thoughts of the sinful Hector Turnbull being driven back from Maidenbridge by Mr Tasker remind us of the two paths of life: "Going down the hills, he remembered; going up the hills, he feared for his salvation".<sup>29</sup>

A consciousness of these important associations makes the reader responsive to implications behind single words and even numbers, which recall the area of reference if not the exact meanings of medieval numerology. In *The Only Penitent*, although Powys by no means supports Hayhoe's intention to build a confessional, he gives strength to the preacher's feelings by the wealth of biblical suggestion in the number three: "These three times had a story been told to him . . . Three times had God taken the trouble to speak to His servant . . . He had shown the parable three times".<sup>30</sup> The most relevant association of that number in view of Hayhoe's love for his people, is when Christ asked Peter three times to "Feed my sheep". And in Powys's tale *Feed My Swine* the change in that last word carries much weight. The love of Christ and His forgiveness are altered into the lazy arrogance of Dottery, whose concern for wealth brings Truggin and the villagers down to the level of swine, as also

the Prodigal Son in that parable was brought low. The use of "swine" also recalls the implications of the animal in man, the getter in Dottery, whose own comfort and welfare is his first and only consideration, and the mythological association of swine with the goddess of the Underworld. (The same connexion can be made in *Mr. Tasker's Gods*.)

The surnames of the characters have been seen to reflect their natures to some extent, and their Christian names are also chosen to reflect qualities that those names mean or imply. Tom Twiddy renames Bottle in *Bottle's Path*, "Christopher" after the patron saint of travellers, because he is for ever helping him on his way. Powys's wealth and ease of allusion especially with regard to the odd word like this, can easily be lost, perhaps to such an extent to say that it may often be superfluous. There is a mention of two pitchers in *Mr Weston's Good Wine* when Luke is preparing his money to pay Weston for the wine to fill his well. It is made in passing, but elaborated upon enough to suggest that Powys had something in mind, probably Christ's description of the man who was to meet the disciples and furnish the Upper Room for the Last Supper in Luke 22. The reference is not redundant, for the sacrament of Holy Communion was instigated there, and that is part of the reason for the image of wine in the book.

It is clear that the Bible is not used half so much in the earlier as in the later novels, and it is largely the wealth of indirect allusion and the consequent atmosphere that is missing. In *Unclay*, the early Old Testament references are continued when Hayhoe and Winnie flee from Bullman's gardens, the garden of Eden, in the company of Death who is smiting the bed of begonias, which illustrates the human progress from "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust". Earlier, when Winnie has been running from Death, she brushes past Tinker Jar, and finds she can outstrip her pursuer with ease: "they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint". This kind of indirect allusion makes feasible the creation

of the God-figures: Jar in *The Two Thieves* comes as a thief in the night; the imaginary net of the Fisherman in *Mockery Gap* reveals him as a fisher of men, and he is also "resurrected"; Weston amongst many other allusions, raises from the dead the girl whom he knocked over.

Some of these allusions are so much a part of the reader's consciousness that they are as good as direct references. Abram in a part of *An Interpretation of Genesis* adapted by Powys from the Koran is ever aware of a "still small voice" guiding him; and Johnnie Chew in *God* is sure that "God so loved the world that He showed to John the holy delight of love . . ." (160)

Powys is often even more direct; he draws our attention to verses by setting them apart in his narrative, but even in so doing, he stresses the relevance of the Bible as an account of life.

A certain phrase, 'pure in heart', though thought meaningless by some—and certainly Deborah never used it herself—became Solly's aunt more than any other that we know of.<sup>31</sup>

This gives authority to Powys's initial account of her character especially in that, in the novel, she *has* seen God. The verse to which the Bible opens when Luke lets it fall after his final attempt to preach in Dodder is a far more obvious and less accomplished summary of his character:

"And beheld among the simple ones,  
I discerned among the youths a  
Young man void of understanding."<sup>32</sup>

Some of the references both direct and indirect are redundant in that they only show off Powys's knowledge or the reader's own assiduous research. A title such as *Thy Beautiful Flock* (Jeremiah 13, 20,) links with the subject of Oliver's sheep, which are in decline, but goes no further than that. Neither are the references to more obscure biblical characters helpful; any good in a parallel situation which might throw light on the subject in hand is negated by the contrivance of the comparison (even if in

Powys's mind the association is *not* contrived, and time and again Powys has to be justified in his own terms). Take for instance the contrast in *The Two Thieves* between John Roe and Theudas from Acts 5, 36; or Hayhoe's observation that "Daisy was certainly not hated by John as Tamar had been of Ammon".<sup>33</sup> Not only does Powys go too far, but sometimes so do his readers in their endeavour to find biblical comparisons.<sup>34</sup> Some insist upon close literal connections when to admit implication is sufficient. There is little idea in Powys of one to one allegory.

However, having said that, there are tales which re-enact a biblical event entirely, rework biblical passages. Again in this type of allegory and the thought behind it Powys shows how the Bible reflects the whole of life in all ages, how life itself writes the Bible, and how all experiences end only to be reborn. Just as in *Ulysses* Joyce gives his characters Homeric significance, so Powys's ordinary folk are raised to the level of importance indicated by the Bible; and biblical characters are envisaged as ordinary men, their exploits everyday happenings. That perhaps is too simplistic; *The Dewpond* does not imply that Mr Gasser is to lead an army, nor that Gideon read *The Times*. But Gasser's intent behind the falling of the dew into the pond, is as valid a test of God as Gideon's episodes with the fleece. The fact that the dew falls all around but not *in* the pond indicates that Gasser is dealing with a God, but a more wilful one than Gideon's.

Jacob Buncle (*Jacob's Well*) is aware of the part of Genesis which his life re-enacts, although he does not (like Priddle in *When Thou Wast Naked*) cause it to come about. The story is not lame repetition of the way Jacob found Rachel at the well, but that tale is made relevant to modern life; the old well in Jacob Buncle's garden is replaced by the new one in the Hoddy's where he finds *his* Rachel. In *What Lack I Yet?* Pinnock is not aware that he is bearing out in his life the commands of Christ to the young man with great possessions in Matthew 19; he honours his mother (more than she deser-

ves), loves his neighbour (at least marries her), and finally he is able to give up his possessions when he realizes the value of Love and Death.

## II

In *When Thou Wast Naked* and *Feed My Swine* we have examples of conscious and selective interpretation of passages to suit individuals. Personal interpretation is of such importance to Powys that he causes Mr Weston to criticize Cowper for believing so firmly in the words of the Bible: "no poet should ever believe the words of another, however true he may think his own".<sup>35</sup> As the comment in *Unclay* about God killing off the best young writers to steal their ideas suggests, the Bible is just one book written by God or by the "moods of God" in man. All good books through the ages reflect the eternal doings of man just as well, although the Bible still remains the archetype. We are free to take and interpret from these books as much as from the Bible: Solly bases his life on the history book of America. The Bible, according to *An Interpretation of Genesis*, was written by the poets, and poets there have been through the ages since it was written, adding to the complete picture of man. The Bible tells of man, "and our best books follow the same plan, and try to show the same sad story with a gay laugh".<sup>36</sup> This explains Powys's own approach to life in his works perhaps, and maybe also indicates the areas of literature that most appeal to him.

For Powys, Christian writers "our men whom we employ upon the road",<sup>37</sup> are expounders of the life advocated by the Bible, but not all of them. Obviously Powys has little in common with evangelical Christianity; he is scathing in parts of his account of Wesley in the *Soliloquies* also. Rather, with Henry Turnbull, he appreciates "books written by old forgotten Church Fathers who thought like angels".<sup>38</sup> His choice of authors outside specifically religious bounds is quite arbitrary and depends on his tastes and beliefs. Like Adams in *Joseph Andrews* it is

possible to travel and to know of the whole world without stirring from a book. Powys endorses John Roe in *The Two Thieves* (in spite of the element of escapism), who

carried to the cottage a few of his favourite books. These books were his companions: each book was a great estate. He could wander in them, but no steward would trouble him with tales of blight, or earthquake. He could remain at ease in his possessions, that were the fair fruits of the mind.<sup>39</sup>

The feelings of Powys's reading and understanding of literature become a part of his own writings. Before looking at his absorption of works of modern, mainly English, literary fiction, we should notice that his work often touches upon some of the older and misty borderlands of organised religious writing. In Powys's view of the repetition of all life, life dying but ever re-born, old but always new, he is recalling some of the ethos of the eternal religious and mythological cycle; and the actions of characters under the "moods of God" may be seen as worship or appeasement of the controlling deities. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Powys knew of ancient religions, although it is known he read and admired *The Golden Bough*; and the influences of Indian and Chinese philosophies, Manichaeism and so forth can be traced in his work. Ultimately it matters little if they are not identified, as Powys moulds all borrowings from religious sources into his own thought. It is more relevant to touch on folk-lore in Powys—the watering-down of those religious experiences, but also the language and feeling of common man—and its syncretism into Christianity.

Powys would agree with Hayday in *Make Thyself Many* when he teaches Ophelia of the truth not only of the Bible but also in "the old romances and country ballads . . . and other books where the sages of old teach wisdom" (19). Luke in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* is a person associated clearly with folk-lore: the rhythm in this passage is nursery rhyme: "Luke Bird had gone to his well to fetch a little water".<sup>40</sup> Later on, after Bunce

has given him the conditions whereby he may win Jenny, "he bethought him of all the tasks set by cruel fathers in past times to the young gentleman who sought their fair daughters in marriage".<sup>41</sup> More local examples of folk culture are also integrated into the framework of the novel itself: we are told that Morsey warns his fellow sexton, Grunter, not to pay for his own beer, as it will bring him bad luck: "'Thee'll be told to dig up a dead corpsey.'"—which is exactly what happens.<sup>42</sup> Powys uses animals and plants in his stories to carry the overtones that they bear in folk legend and pagan religion, and they serve to unite Christianity in the tales with older pagan elements, just as the apocryphal stories surrounding Christ's life do in *Mockery Gap* and *Kindness in a Corner*.

The concision in using such symbols is repeated often in direct reference to classical mythology. Mr Cheney's bull in a passage of *Mockery Gap* replete with sexual imagery, is said to follow Dinah Pottle "mistaking her apparently for another Europa" (75); and the scene in *Kindness in a Corner* in which Dibben sees Dottery's "girl from the cupboard" and gives chase into a laurel bush is summed up quite succinctly in Mrs Tubb's words: "'It was only Daphne'" (193).

The same sort of succinctness as in these references characterizes Powys's allusions to literature in general. When in *Soliloquies of a Hermit* he asks, "And why should I want to hurt anyone when I can enjoy reading *Tristram Shandy*?" (46), we understand some of the standards which he appreciates. The title *Nor Iron Bars* from Lovelace's "To Althea, From Prison", sums up the feeling of the tale, even if the exact circumstances are not the same as in the poem. As for the title of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, we cannot be sure; but the passage in *Emma* contains pointers to three of the most important themes of Powys. Mr Elton is a little drunk, he is in love and ready to die if refused.<sup>43</sup>

Powys is never afraid of direct mention of the authors who for him continue the Bible, write truly of man. Neville, found climbing

over his hedge by Turnbull in *Mr. Tasker's Gods* says, "In the same manner . . . did the robber in *Pilgrim's Progress* get into the way" (89). In the same work Henry Turnbull considers a passage from Milton after visiting Tasker and witnessing his violence, and concludes from it that though this world is terrible, there is none better (not exactly the conclusion that Milton reaches). However, in *Unclay* the same writer is out of favour with Death and Hayhoe, and most probably Powys; his poetry is magnificent but he is too much of a puritan.

This kind of direct reference is a part of Powys's obviously conscious artistry, a fiction which we are to recognize as fiction. It fits into the tenor of his work as easily as parts of scripture slip into the normal flow of Law, Bunyan and Powys himself. But nevertheless, it tends to ostentation, communicates only with a learned audience, and does sometimes go too far. The wood in *Mockery Gap* is said to be the same one that Coleridge writes of at the end of *The Ancient Mariner*, an allusion which adds nothing to our understanding. The frequent mentions of Cowper only serve to illustrate Powys's admiration of him.

Other passages show correspondence with authors which are not explicitly stated. *The Shut Door* is close in its action to the Wakefield *Second Shepherd's Pageant*, and the moral tone of other medieval plays is in many ways similar to Powys's: the story of *The Corpse and the Flea* parallels *Everyman* for example, Good Deeds' role being adopted by the flea. Powys's relationship with medieval thought is made most obvious in the actual appearance of the Devil in *Christ In the Cupboard* and *The Two Thieves*, and in the personification of Death in *Unclay* a device taken from the whole understanding behind one of the major strains of the medieval lyric.

*Circe Truggin* embodies a tale far older than the medieval, but Powys does not get lost in the depth of ancient history; more modern literature is equally a part of his consciousness. Both Milton and Bunyan are often recalled, and the link of some of Powys's themes with Shakespeare's later

plays has been touched upon. The romantic imaginings of Wordsworth and Coleridge are also relevant at times. *The Old Cumberland Beggar* is particularly appropriate to *The Useless Woman*, Jane feeling that beggars elicit the good in people, and also to *A Gift for the King* where there is enough dignity in Mrs Topp to prevent her from asking help of the parish. The same instinctive blessing which fires Coleridge in seeing the rook in *This Lime Tree Bower My Prison* is shared by Mr Poose in *Hester Dominy* and Mr Crossley on seeing the child in *Black Bryony*. Moreover the whole feeling for the power of nature in general Powys shares with these two poets.

His associations with the feelings expressed by novelists are largely directed at the eighteenth century novel. Sterne has already been mentioned, but Powys has an obvious admiration for Fielding. *The Shut Door* and *In Good Earth* both contain father-figures who adopt to their prospective sons in law the attitude of Squire Western to Tom Jones; and Neville, unfortunately uncharacteristically, reminds us of Parson Adams when he climbs out of the window on one occasion to meet Turnbull. Richardson is also recalled when Susie Dawe gets married in *Unclay*; she wears black, the colour suggested by Arabella for Clarissa's marriage with Solmes, a marriage arranged like May's in *The White Weathercock* with no thought for the feelings of the bride. At times Powys also slips into the horrors of the Gothic Novel as when Tulk disposes of his victims; but these moments show him at his weakest. At best the terror of which he writes can be compared with Mrs Radcliffe's novels, where the horror is real because it is of the mind. The atmosphere created by the narrative being tinted by personal fear, in *The Italian* for instance, is reproduced equally powerfully in *The Hunted Beast* and parts of *Mark Only* and *Abraham Men*. The overall tone of Powys is best compared, perhaps, with the "white melancholy" of Thomas Gray, to whom Powys refers in *Unclay*, Gray who is as capable of light humour as Powys is himself.

Critics have managed to compare Powys with many writers besides these. Ward especially insists on Powys's close connection with Freud;<sup>44</sup> and Wilkinson mentions that Powys read and admired Spinoza and Schopenhauer among the philosophers. He also associates Powys's irony with Swift's, and Carr sees the cynicism of *Troilus and Cressida* informing his work. *Piers Plowman*, Cowper, Emily Bronte, Donne, have all afforded comparisons with Powys in some way or another, and there are obvious contemporaries with whom he is comparable; Eliot, Hardy, Mary Webb.<sup>45</sup> His own reading was vast, but Powys knows acquaintance with so many authors means nothing. The Dottery of *Kindness in a Corner* is a continual butt for his ridicule because his book learning means nothing. What relation to life does his translation of Froissart from Old French into Latin bear? He is rightly described as "but a closed coffin for the dead languages" (21). There may be even a hint of self-mockery in Powys's description of Dottery, but his own use of the Bible and literature is far from pedantic. Literature tells of life, and Powys along with all those he admires, and indeed with their help, has been continuing writing the story of the Bible.

He has simply been telling stories which are rooted in the deepest truths, portraying men and women, even ladies and gentlemen,

in those simple lines and clear unshaded colours that are instantly visible to an eye accustomed to watch, first and always, for the great determining elements of good and evil.<sup>46</sup>

There is no sense of pedantic scholasticism about any of it; as Kermode says,

In all his reference to Milton, Fielding, Swift, John Wesley, Cervantes and many others, there is a kind of literal richness, an atmosphere of understanding, of timeless fellowship; an utter absence of historicity.<sup>47</sup>

Literature is the Good Wine that Grobe understands it to be in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*: it elicits the feelings of a good man whose life it also records.

But just as the best of books, the Bible, is replaced by *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, so literature is inferior to life. The patterns that the Bible speaks of are actually lived and renewed in the cycle of Nature. The love that the Wine represents is of more importance than the love that Grobe feels in his books. Even as a recorder of the words and ways of God and of Truth it is inferior to another work. When the crow in *The Coat and the Crow* says of God, "Neither do we consider that He only speaks out of one book" (247), he is not referring to the books of other writers, but to the Book of Nature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Numerals in parentheses in the text refer to pages in the respective First Editions of Powys's works, except in the following instances:

*Fables*, 2nd ed., Chatto and Windus, 1931.

*Mr. Tasker's Gods*, The Trigon Press, 1977.

*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, Heinemann, 1967.

The same editions are used in these notes.

<sup>2</sup>*Lao Tzu*, tr. D. C. Lau, Penguin, 1963, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>*The Race*, *The West Country Magazine*, No. 2, (Autumn 1946), 90-3, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", *Selected Essays*, Faber; 1951).

<sup>5</sup>Harry Coombes, "T. F. Powys's Good Wine", *Delta*, 14, (1958), 20-4, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup>*Lao Tzu*, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup>That does not mean that they are all bad, in the sense of "immortal" in the "immortal mood": Powys is as inconsistent in his ideas about what lasts as in anything else. His earliest claim that only evil is immortal is not his final one by any means.

<sup>8</sup>F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, Pelican Books; 1972, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup>T. S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages V*.

<sup>10</sup>*Mr Weston's Good Wine*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, Faber, 1961, pp. 218-9, 237-8.

<sup>12</sup>See *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, pp. 29-33, from which the following quotations are taken.

<sup>13</sup>L. U. Wilkinson, *Welsh Ambassadors: Powys Lives and Letters*, (2nd ed., Bertram Rota; 1971) p. 17.

<sup>14</sup>*Tadnol (Two Stories: Come and Dine, and Tadnol)* p. 66.

<sup>15</sup>*Mr Weston's Good Wine*, p. 172.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 109, 183, 192 respectively.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup>*Black Bryony*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup>"Hidden Truth", A review of *An Interpretation of Genesis* in *Nation and Athenaeum*, 13 July 1929, p. 514.

<sup>20</sup>*An Interpretation of Genesis*, p. 73.

<sup>21</sup>*Soliloquies of a Hermit*, p. 133.

<sup>22</sup>Michael W. Murphy, "The British Tale in the Early Twentieth Century: Walter de la Mare, A. E. Coppard and T. F. Powys", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, 1971), p. 225.

<sup>23</sup>*An Interpretation of Genesis*, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from T. F. Powys to L. U. Wilkinson dated June 1909. Quoted in Frank Kermode, "The Art of T. F. Powys, Ironist", *The Welsh Review*, 6 (1947), 205-19, p. 212.

<sup>25</sup>Martin Steinmann jr. in Ch. VII (pp. 192-328) of "T. F. Powys: A Thematic Study", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Minnesota 1955), analyses statistically passages from *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and *Mr. Tasker's Gods* for poly-syllabicality, shortness of sentences, word length and so on, and compares them with other writers. His conclusions go some way to dispelling the popular view of Powys's excessive simplicity of style.

<sup>26</sup>I would not go so far in this matter as to concur with Q. D. Leavis in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), where (p. 210) she implies that the idiom of the country folk as recorded in the works of Powys amongst others has evolved partially through the in-

fluence of the Authorized Version, that cottage folk found in it a medium of self-expression.

<sup>27</sup>*Bottle's Path*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>28</sup>*Kindness in a Corner*, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup>*Mr. Tasker's Gods*, p. 145.

<sup>30</sup>All from one short paragraph, *The Only Penitent, Bottle's Path*, p. 104.

<sup>31</sup>*Innocent Birds*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>*Abraham Men, The Left Leg*, p. 282. (Proverbs 7.7.)

<sup>33</sup>*Unclay*, p. 156, referring to 2 Samuel 13. 2.

<sup>34</sup>See e.g. Martin Steinmann jr., "The Symbolism of T. F. Powys", *Critique*, 1 (1957), 49-63, pp. 52-3.

<sup>35</sup>*Mr Weston's Good Wine*, p. 191.

<sup>36</sup>*Soliloquies of a Hermit*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>37</sup>*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup>*Mr Tasker's Gods*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup>*The Two Thieves*, p. 249.

<sup>40</sup>*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>43</sup>See David Holbrook, Introduction to *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, Heinemann, 1967, p. xii.

<sup>44</sup>See Littleton C. Powys, *The Joy Of It*, 1937, p. 265, where he says in a letter to R. H. Ward, "Can you imagine Theodore using the language which the so-called followers of Freud are wont to use? for I can't". See also *Why I Have Given Up Writing*, *John O'London's Weekly and The Outline*, 36, (23 Oct. 1936), 145-6 & 152, p. 146, where Theodore himself denies Freud's influence on his early writings.

<sup>45</sup>This is not a complete list. Neither is there space unfortunately, available here to justify these comparisons or place Powys satisfactorily in a contemporary light. Such a task would prove worth while for Powys's literary reputation, I feel.

<sup>46</sup>Hamish Miles, "Good Wine, Burning Bush" (a review of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*), *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 7 April 1928, p. 740.

<sup>47</sup>Frank Kermode, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

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# Patricia Vaughan Dawson

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## Notes on *The Brazen Head* Sculptures and Etchings

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All John Cowper Powys's writing is extremely visual and I was especially struck by the images in *The Brazen Head*.

I started by modelling the sculptures and while working on them I began to read books about alchemy which were illustrated by reproductions of drawings, paintings and engravings, dating from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In them I sometimes found symbols that were in Powys's book. An obvious one is the pair of piscine fish in Sir Mort's pond.

The prints and sculptures are not intended as illustrations and experts on *The Brazen Head* may find discrepancies between my work and the text.

### *The Sculptures* [Plate 1.]

The structure on which the sculptures rest was made of wire and paper and cast in fibreglass. The sculptures were cast in bronze resin. The whole artefact is intended to sit on a table so that the viewer can walk round it.

The crucifix that hangs on the central phallic prominence presides over the action. I had dreamed the figure, as it is modelled, with bent arms. This makes it impossible as a representation of a crucifixion but I have since discovered that this posture was used for prayer in the Celtic church.

### *The Etchings*

The following notes were intended to help viewers of the work who had not read the book.

Notes on the Etchings based on Images from  
*The Brazen Head*  
by John Cowper Powys

### Introduction

The story of the Brazen Head centres round Friar Roger Bacon the 13th century teacher and inventor who fell foul of his order by practising alchemy. It is set during the years when he was out of favour. John Cowper Powys has imagined that he was kept under duress in a priory in Somerset where he has made a head of brass which when animated would utter oracular sayings.

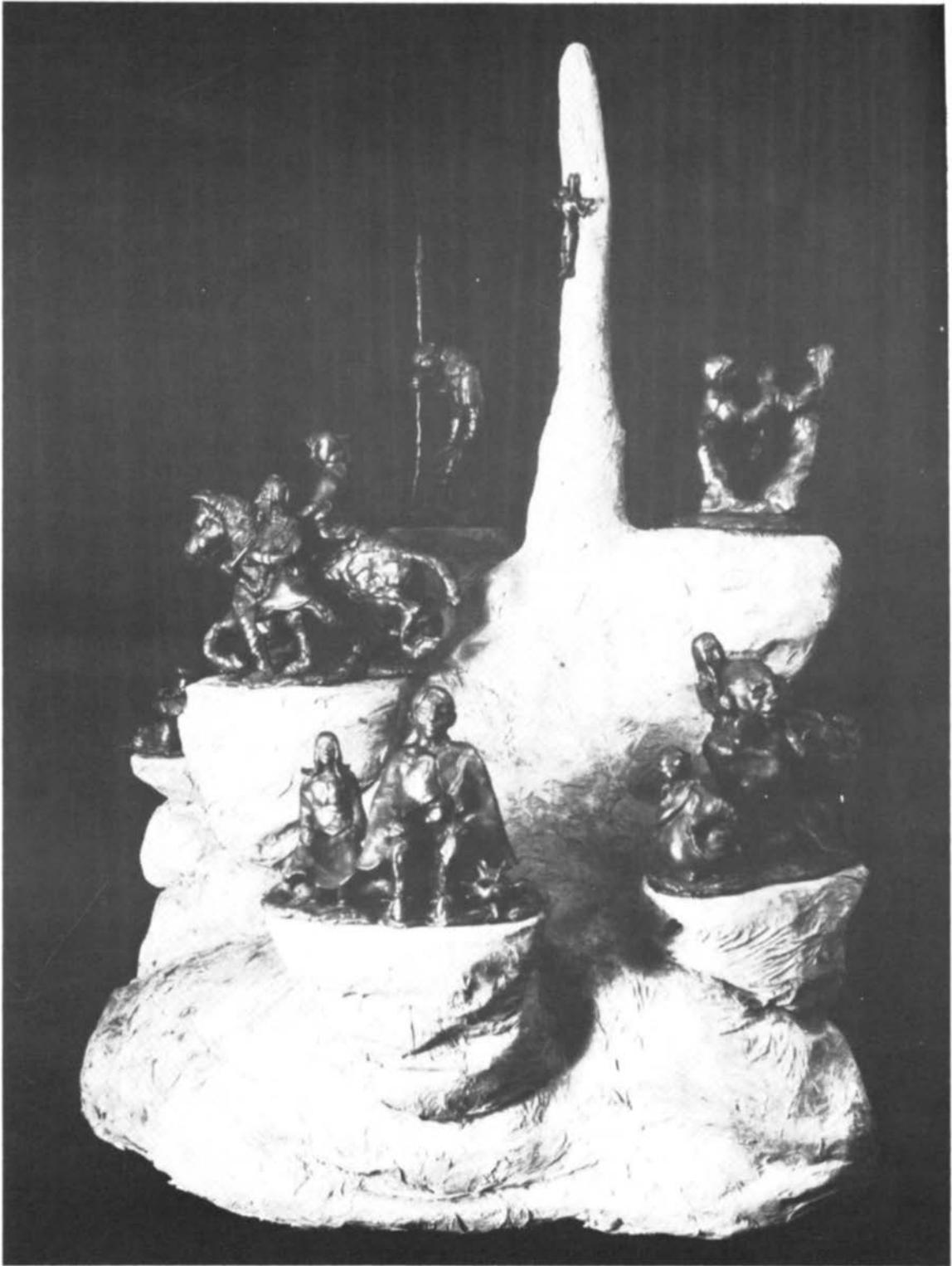
The action takes place in February and concerns people living in and visiting the immediate area.

In the prints I have shown the images in symbolic shapes: The Egg; The Half Moon; The Archway; The Cross; The Circle; and The Flames.

In each print I have used the same two colours and the same dimensions. By superimposing the colours I have aimed to produce a different mood in each. In the last print I have separated the colours to show in the flames the gold which is the end product of alchemy.

### 1. *The Sunrise* [Plate 2]

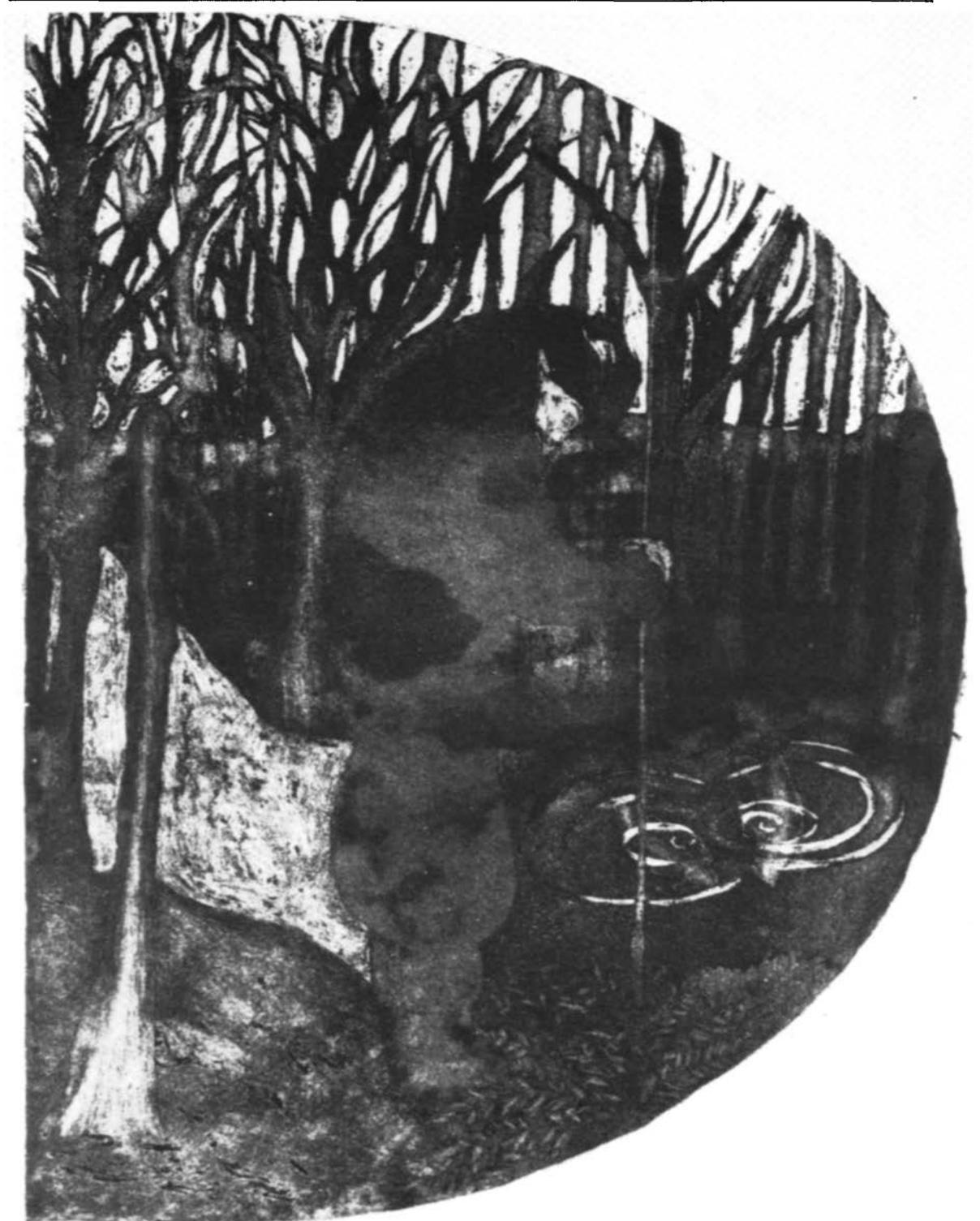
Lil Umbra the daughter of an old knight Sir Mort Abyssum sits with her father's faithful servant Peleg, a giant who is half mongolian and half jewish. Sir Mort saved his life and brought him home from the crusades. They have come to see the waning moon which is still visible at the time of the sunrise.



*Plate 1*



Plate 2



*Plate 3*

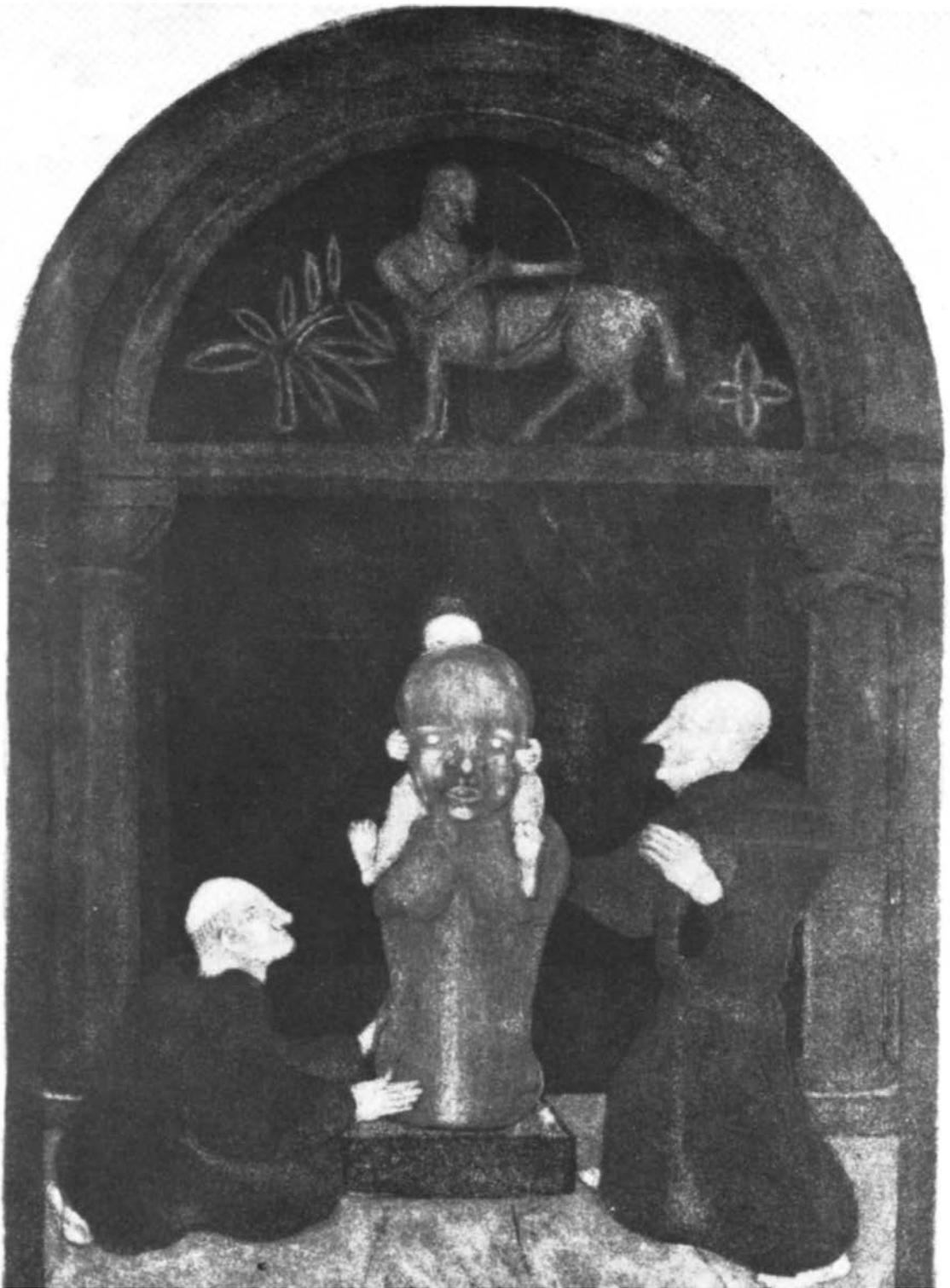


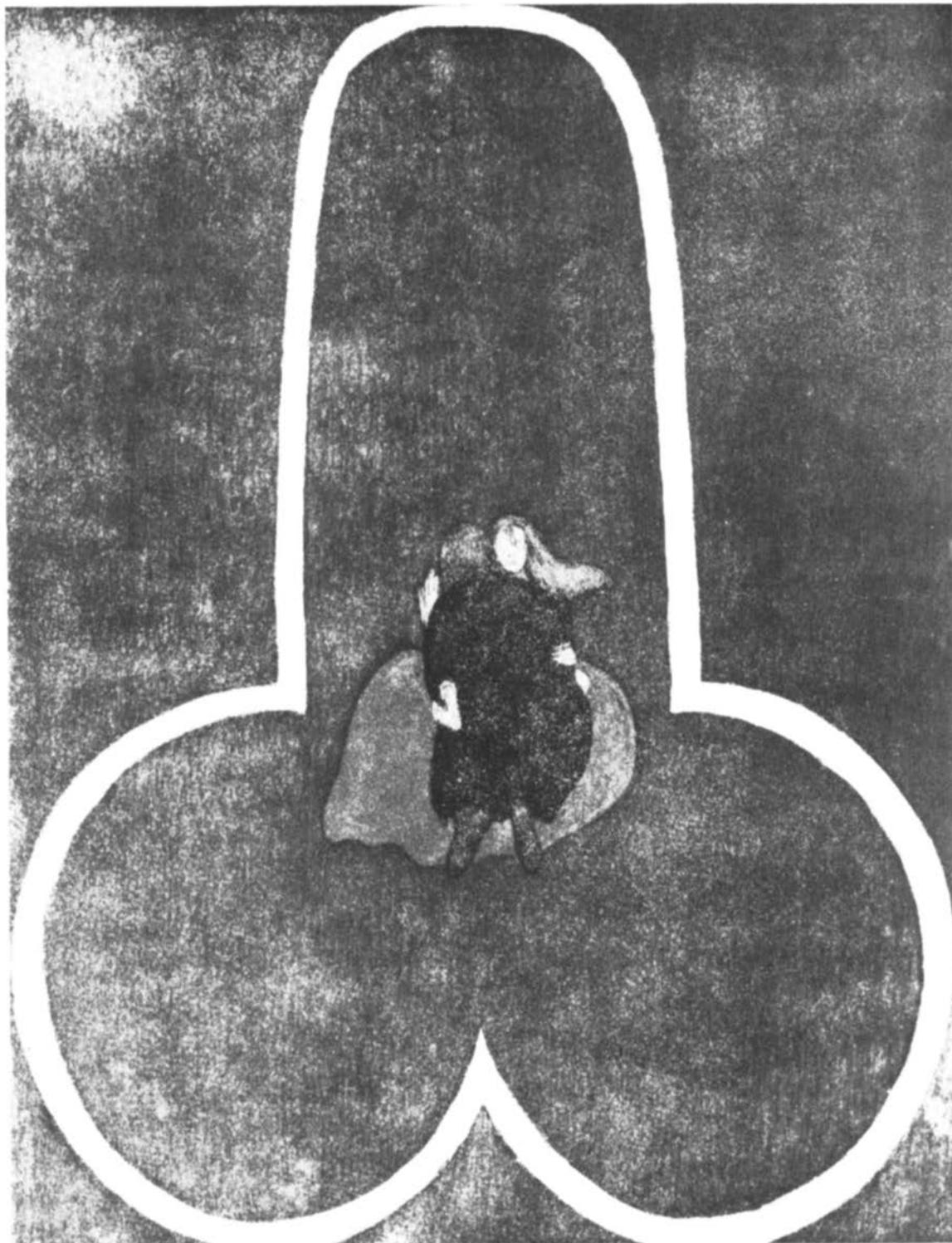
Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



*Plate 7*



*Plate 8*

2. *Sir Mort at the Fish-pond* [Plate 3]

Sir Mort Abyssum, returning from a hunting expedition, stands looking into a fish-pond where two elderly fish are the only inhabitants. I have made him so absorbed into the landscape that he is barely separable from it.

3. *The Animation of the Head* [Plate 4]

Friar Bacon assisted by a younger friar has procured Ghosta, a girl working at a nearby nunnery, who animates the head. To do this they place Ghosta astride its neck.

I have included a carving of Sagitarius partly because in alchemical symbolism he stands for fixation and in the story a horse shows signs of turning into a centaur.

4. *St. Bonaventura* [Plate 5]

St Bonaventura as head of the Franciscan order has come to England to see what Bacon is doing. He takes a lift on Charon a horse belonging to Spardo (the bastard son of the King of Bohemia) who is leading it. Spardo believes his horse is turning into a centaur.

I have shown them accompanied by three symbols, the Holy Ghost, the serpent and the sword. The thorn bush is the one that scratches the horse.

5. *The Destruction of the Thorn* [Plate 6]

Baron Maldung and his wife Lady Lilt believe all animals to be good and all plants to be bad. They are destroying the thorn bush because it has scratched the horse. Lost Towers, their castle, is in the background. The sheep and the oak tree are described in the text.

6. *Peter and Lilith on the Cerne Giant*  
[Plate 7]

Peter is a student of magnetism and a peregrinating antichrist. He carries a loadstone with which he plans to destroy his rivals. He has met Lilith the seductive daughter of Baron Maldung.

They copulate inside the outline of the Cerne Giant (a hill figure in Dorset). This is an ancient fertility custom.

7. *The Ball of Fire* [Plate 8]

At the end of the story Peter and Lilith hold the loadstone and attract magnetic forces which cause them to be caught up into a ball of fire. This crashes on to the Brazen Head and destroys it. The figures are white hot and the two colours are separated so that in the flames the ultimate gold of alchemy can be seen.

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# Sonia Tilson

## John Cowper Powys and Kenneth Hopkins: A Study of their Letters

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The correspondence between Kenneth Hopkins and John Cowper Powys lasted from August 1936 to November 1961, over twenty-five years; from the beginning of Hopkins's literary career to its height, ending neatly if sadly just at the point where Hopkins begins work on his book, *The Powys Brothers*.<sup>1</sup> Powys on the other hand was sixty-three when the correspondence began and eighty-nine when it ended, his powers it might reasonably be supposed on the wane. In fact, however, he published eighteen books during the time in question including the greatest perhaps of all his works, the magnificent *Porius* (1951), which he wrote in his late seventies. Thus the correspondence covers a period of great creativity on the part of both writers. It must be stated straight away that the focus is on Hopkins; his ambitions, his achievements, his fears and failures. There is little here for the seeker of new biographical facts about Powys (except maybe the information that he only washed his hands once a week) and in a sense, it is true what Hopkins points out, that Powys's letters have "nothing of a private nature" in them (L. 285).<sup>2</sup> Every correspondence is unique, however, and two hundred and eighty-five letters cannot be exchanged without much being revealed on both sides.

Powys, as is well-known, was an inveterate letter writer: writing letters was for him a worse temptation than not doing so is for most others. It was as hard for him to refuse to enter on a correspondence as it was to terminate one.<sup>3</sup> "Moved to reciprocity" by an astonishing variety of correspondents he gave of himself in this way continuously throughout his life, different personalities or different re-

quirements attracting towards themselves different facets of his highly complex nature. Most people vary the tone and type of content of their letters according to the recipient to some extent but Powys does this far more than is usual, the actor in him, perhaps, responding to the different rôles he is called upon to play. This is not to say he was all things to all men or that his nature was disintegrated: he is always unmistakably himself and the total impression one gets of his personality is of extraordinary complexity extraordinarily well integrated. Thus the letters to Louis Wilkinson,<sup>4</sup> his life-long friend, with their relaxed intimate tone and somewhat gossipy character are very different from the high-keyed emotional tone of the letters to Nicholas Ross, "Bastard of my Soul", a man whom he had met only twice but towards whom he certainly felt a psychic affinity and whose need seems to have been intense. Different again, though with similar vibrations are the more psycho-analytical and literary letters to Professor G. Wilson Knight<sup>5</sup> and the homely friendliness and book gossip of the letters to Glyn Hughes.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship revealed in the letters exchanged with Kenneth Hopkins is basically that of an old master and a novice ('pupil' would be inaccurate since surprisingly little teaching is done) even though the novice naturally ceases to be any such thing after a while; the focus being, as was said, on Hopkins. The relationship was initiated and on the whole perpetuated by Hopkins; they met, at his request, through Powys's brother Llewelyn to whom he had previously introduced himself. Llewelyn was afraid that the young poet might prove demanding and, knowing his brother's

weakness for reciprocating ardour, warned Hopkins more than once to hold back. In a letter dated July 22, 1936, he writes: "My brother is a man of so gentle and generous a disposition that anyone is able to exploit him—and he has a gift of making everybody think they are invaluable to him and he lays himself out utterly to please anyone he likes . . . And you must be very precious of his time—and not after you have met him write to him too often for here again—he is defenceless, being very scrupulous about answering letters and very tender of other people's feelings." The meeting took place in Chaldon on August 2. Hopkins took his copies of *Wolf Solent* and *Ducdame* to be inscribed and asked if Powys would accept a book of his poems. "We were together almost an hour," he writes to Llewelyn two days later, "and the time passed very swiftly for me, but I remembered your words and I think stayed not too long . . . It was one of the most memorable occasions of my life."<sup>8</sup> Llewelyn's apprehension that here was a potential absorber of his brother's time and energy was not ill-founded, for at least one hundred and eighty-six letters were written by John Cowper to "that beautiful young letter swallower,"<sup>9</sup> as he described him to Louis Wilkinson, before the end. Presumably however this was no burden, for Powys could, as is shown in these letters, reject a plea when it suited him, and the correspondence must have been mutually agreeable. Still, it is clear that it was begun by Hopkins, since Powys's letter of August 14, the first of the collection, is in reply to the sending of a little book of poems, and on the whole it seems it was Hopkins who set the pace and who got the correspondence going again after it had lapsed. This persistence is reminiscent of the passage in his autobiography, *The Corruption of a Poet*,<sup>10</sup> where he tells of how at an early age he revealed to his sister the secret of his success: "keep on, like I do."

Powys's function is to give credence to the fact that Hopkins is a poet: he is to provide support, reassurance, recognition, applause, all of which he does with charac-

teristic generosity. This is largely the point of the correspondence and Hopkins has his fit audience indeed. What was in it for Powys, apart of course from his interest in the young poet and his affection for him, was perhaps the pleasure of giving pleasure, surely a temptation here with so much pleasure, so easy to give. Sometimes indeed there is a feeling of 'kindness in a corner', but usually, in an emotional sense, certainly in no other, Powys is a patron, solidly there in the background, paying up when required. Concentration on the correspondence might lead to an unbalanced view of the importance of Powys in Hopkins' life but it is difficult to imagine his life, in the late thirties and early forties at any rate, without that background presence. Might some-one else have been more helpful in fact; offering more worldly, practical advice, more assistance other than emotional? For it is noticeable as the correspondence proceeds that, with very few exceptions, in no other way would Powys give assistance: there are practically no useful contacts, apart from Louis Wilkinson, no serious practical advice, nor, later on, any material of his own that Hopkins could make use of as an editor. One must remember of course that Powys was not a man of means or influence but it is interesting to note that his generosity was not unqualified.

The same caution is apparent in the matter of visits and meetings. There are in fact only six meetings altogether although many more are proposed by Hopkins. They all went pleasantly but as Powys grew older he became, with some reason, increasingly resistant to the idea of visitors, "the curse of old writers" (L. 270). So many people laid claim on his time that it was impossible for there not to be disappointments. An example of this is the débâcle at Paddington Station in July, 1939, where Hopkins, "a Vision of Blue" waits to greet Powys only to see him swept off by Oliver Wilkinson and his wife, and, surely a further aggravation, George Lewin, whom he himself had introduced to Powys not long before. Powys's apologetic letter (L. 100), swiftly written from Paddington the next morning, perhaps

made up for the slight, despite its annoying insistence on the brilliance of Hopkins' attire. When another attempt to meet Powys later in the month in London fails, Hopkins uses the moral advantage to demand "something especially long and loving" (L. 104) to be inscribed in his copy of *The Pleasures of Literature*. The cancellation of a proposed visit to Corwen by the Hopkinses on account of Betty Hopkins' illness, brings forth a response into which it is difficult not to read relief: "O you were absolutely right to give her a peaceful holiday" etc. (L. 158). When visits actually do take place, moreover, there is a marked stinginess in the arrangements made: the Hopkinses are instructed to come (in September, 1950) "*between your lunch and your tea*" (Powys's underlining) for Phyllis never has tea—neither in the ordinary sense do I . . ." "She" (Betty Hopkins) "will not want to be the *only* tea drinker" (L. 249). Noticeable also is the fact that while many gifts were sent to Powys by Hopkins: books, packets of tea and cigarettes (in times when these were very hard to come by), a tie, almost all of Hopkins' publications, none came the other way, not even a wedding present or a birthgift for his son. Against this should be balanced (apart from other considerations) the straitness of Powys's means and also, of course, the kindly trouble taken to store the young man's letters and poems, to provide references, to inscribe all the books sent by him for this purpose, and to return them, this last involving expense as well as trouble.<sup>11</sup>

What then was Powys's attitude to his young friend? From evidence found in his journals as well as from internal evidence it would seem that his imagination was caught by him as a romantic figure. In an entry in his journal dated August 2, 1936, the date of their first meeting, he writes of him as: "a beautiful and courageous and dignified young poet—like Keats—P.<sup>12</sup> thought"! A less lyrical but comparably approving note is struck in a letter dated June 1, 1938, to Louis Wilkinson, an introduction to whom was being solicited by Hopkins. Having described Hopkins as, "a

great hand . . . at amorous & indeed lecherous poetry," Powys continues: "I have found him a *most* easy and entertaining lad—with a lot of tact—& by no means a fool—and he is nice-looking and a terrific bibliophile".<sup>13</sup> Clearly he liked him and was touched by his courage, beauty and frailty (relative that is to the Powys powerful frame, for Mr. Hopkins while slightly built and not tall seems always to have possessed excellent health). Powys often seems to worry about him over-tasking himself and is very firm in his advice not to take a labouring job (L. 48). Indeed, the youthful poet with neither money, nor contacts, supported only by a boundless faith in his own talent and future would be touching to an elderly writer who, despite his advantages, knew after all "the weariness of the way". When in March 1938 Hopkins announces his intention to become a poet tramp and make his way, selling his poems en route, to London, via Corwen, Powys is enchanted. Paraphrasing Scott, he exclaims:

The way was bright the harp was strung  
The Minstrel was carefree and young  
His flashing eyes and buoyant air  
His grace his mien so debonair  
Won him good welcome everywhere!

. . . And welcome, O many times welcome,  
dear Kenneth, will you be when by your  
cockle-hat and staff And your sandal shoon  
we know our English Catullus to be at our  
postern. (L. 31)

When Hopkins sets off with his pack from Powys's house to visit James Hanley, Powys writes in his journal:

(April 12, 1938) He looked a very brave young *Elizabethan*—much more like a young Essex off to Ireland, than like Bunyan's "Christian" off to Heaven.

As time goes on a more realistic appraisal of course comes about: Powys becomes aware of such qualities as doggedness, shrewdness, toughness and egotism. In February 1939 he writes ". . . like Uncle John you possess a certain detachment & self-centredness—& also a certain cunning—& also a certain fight in you," and he extends the analogy to Marlowe, Louis

Wilkinson, and, once again, Keats whom Powys could easily imagine travelling in paper wrappers as Hopkins was doing at the time. Equally he becomes aware of his generosity, considerateness, energy and, especially, efficiency. "I think it is *Incredible* (nothing less) *what you do*. I mean how you *manage your affairs* aesthetic artistic poetic editorial practical erotic & military" (L. 182). There is much praise also of Hopkins' judgement and generosity as an editor, and "rare poetic energies" (L. 203).

Powys's appraisal of Hopkins as a poet runs a similar course: after a realistic start praising the wistful airiness and delicacy of his early poems, he catches fire at the idea of Hopkins being a genius, "and you *are*" he asserts, referring to him (L. 31) as "our youngest and best poet of today's bold generation". In a Foreword that he wrote in March 1938 for one of Hopkins' collections of poems<sup>14</sup> he writes of his pleasure in heralding a young poet "who may . . . become an Immortal Name!" and he praises the "passionate simplicity" of his verse. He is especially admiring of Hopkins' expertise in the Shakespearian sonnet: "You are without any doubt the best now living (perhaps who's ever lived) at writing Shakespearian Sonnets" (L. 35) including, on one occasion at any rate, Shakespeare himself (L. 27). In a remarkable gesture Powys includes part of one of these sonnets in his essay on Proust in *The Pleasures of Literature*. He criticises Proust for his jealous passions, "so comically devoid of all impulses of magnanimity towards the objects of their desire, that one begins to sigh for that more indulgent, more generous, less analytical touch of—well! say of the Sonnets of Shakespeare, a touch which can still be found in the poetry of as young a poet as our Dorsetshire Kenneth Hopkins".<sup>15</sup> It must have been intensely gratifying to be placed in such company despite the backhander (L. 46) that Hopkins would thus appear, "like a cuckoo-flower squeezed into a wealth of globed peonies." As the fire dies down, the qualities Powys rightly praises in Hopkins'

work are; "Doric delicacy," wit, and originality. The lightness of Hopkins' poems described by Powys in L. 1: "so fragile & airy & quick *come & gone*, like sad little love-lorn marble-white butterfly-flies on the wing" and similarly, fourteen years later in, "these new markings on butterfly's wings" (L. 251) could also be termed slightness and this is a complaint often made or suggested by Powys. In L. 59, after much pressing, Powys comes right out with it: Hopkins' poetry he says lacks substance, because it lacks "magic", "philosophy," and "real personal deep feeling" in a spiritual sense. It has on the other hand "verbal wit," "sound human psychology" and "fine poetic fancy" (as opposed, however, to imagination), qualities in Powys's opinion which hardly make up for those that are lacking. In this Hopkins is at one with his generation: "Thus we see that you *are* really (even you!) in harmony with *modern poetry* for in modern poetry magic is eliminated deep personal feeling so *diffused* as to *disappear in diffusion* and 'philosophy' driven out by psychology."

Powys is not usually so negative, of course, in his criticism, any more than he is precise. Mostly he contents himself, and the recipient too, perhaps, with high-keyed but vague appreciation. He is diffident of giving Hopkins technical advice: "I feel as if I were telling Keats to change '*deceiving elf*' & he were to have gone off and changed it to something much *worse* like 'The fancy cannot cheat so well as Ghibbelines were feigned to cheat the Guelf'" (L. 46). When he does give such advice the effect on the whole is unfortunate, as when he suggests that Hopkins alter a line in his Faustus poem: "I don't at all like 'with some loved volume.' I'd substitute *summat* with the meaning: or seated at my desk drinking the blood of poetry or logic, or seated at my desk sucking the breasts of poetry or logic" (L. 84). Needless to say, the advice was not taken.

What Powys is really asking of Hopkins is to write the sort of poetry he himself wrote: "heavily magical", mysterious portentous poetry, charged with profound

psychological and spiritual implications and brooding on the romance of human existence. It is poetry full of longing, of a search for the lost world, the lost or impossible love, crying always, "What is beyond? What is beyond?"<sup>16</sup> In the intensity of the quest and the mysteriousness and unattainability of the object (though not, of course, in technique) Powys's poetry goes beyond that of the three major influences on his poetry, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Swinburne, making them seem, respectively, cheerfully pragmatical, maudlin and querulous.

Oh I must follow it high and low,  
Though it leave me cold to your human touch  
Some starry sorcery made me so;  
And from my birth have I been such.<sup>17</sup>

Ordinary human love is impossible; "The Old Story" tells of its failure, lamenting "what might have been." "The Book" indicates the imaginative cause, when a figure "Summoned by my dark heathen book" appears to him:

Oh lost one—lost one—from days long dead,  
When love gave all and died when it gave!  
O head thrown back! O arms outspread!  
O passion stronger than the grave!

Powys writes like Wordsworth ("my great master") of a joy, once possible, taken away for ever leaving only "shadowy recollections," hopeless longing and a sense of permanent alienation in this world. In Powys's poetry, however, there is no coming to terms with this loss:

...

"A grey tree by a forsaken way,  
A forest pool with a shadowy face  
And we breathe deep a moment and say,  
This is the place! This is the place!

What place? We shall never, never know!  
We shall die before our feet have found it.  
Yet by its borders all streams flow;  
And there's not a wind but blows around it!

...

Exiles are we from our very birth;  
And we shall die and be buried far  
From that wilder, lovelier, madder earth,  
Where the lost gods of our people are!<sup>19</sup>

A foster-child indeed in this limited worldly little world, Powys is always trying to break through the barriers of ordinary human existence, to do away with its, to him, often arbitrary limitations. This is clear on a much wider scale in his novels. This constant reaching out for "what is beyond" is perhaps partly what Powys means by the term "Romance".<sup>20</sup> In *A Glastonbury Romance* he writes: "The best love was not lust; nor was it passion. Still less was it any ideal. It was pure Romance! But pure Romance was harsh and grim and stoical and a man must be grim to embrace it."<sup>21</sup>

"Magic" and "Romance" then are not fanciful escapism but the intense spiritual and mental effort of a personality of extraordinary power and sensibility. This is what he looks for and this is what he complains of not finding in Hopkins' poetry. Where he does find another personality with such propensities and pre-occupations, such as Huw Menai or Nicholas Ross, he exults both in them and in himself, but where the imaginative or spiritual rapport is missing the result is disappointment reaching to desolation, as is seen in the poem, "The Shoes":

But nothing of all I said  
Of the gods and the fatal sky,  
And the magical stars that over each head  
Go heavy with destiny,  
Had half such power to bruise;  
Or break such world-deep seals,  
As, "I have a new pair of shoes.  
They are nice. They have low heels."<sup>22</sup>

This is not to suggest of course that Hopkins bruised Powys's soul, but we cannot all be magicians, or Romantics either for that matter, and it is evident that there is some degree of that kind of incompatibility.

Hopkins has a totally different type of nature: urbane (though not worldly) buoyant and witty, he is a man for 'present joys and present laughter' concerned with the ordinary, which is not to say he is an ordinary man. A general tendency is apparent in his manner as in his writings to reduce and deflate to get life into manageable proportions, a sense of humour, which he

defines (L. 47) as a sense of proportion, being necessary he says, to survival. This is evident everywhere in the correspondence perhaps especially so with regard to the war. As the threat of war draws closer in October 1938 he writes: "No! give me a few books, a few friends, bread and cheese and my great staff Exbatterpate with which to slay dictators, and I'll be happy still, and they can partition the world to suit themselves" (L. 76). The poem "The Donkeys" written while he was in the army in France also exemplifies this refusal to become involved with serious matters:

Two donkeys live beside  
This water-mill and river;  
I see no Parson ride  
On either of them ever.

The French were always here  
The Germans lately were,  
The donkeys didn't care,  
And now the English are.

The battle rose and fell,  
The donkeys stayed at home;  
They like it very well  
Beside the river Drome.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Hopkins' method of defence against distress is to laugh it off, to disparage and deprecate, or simply to ignore it. That intriguing poem "The Stranger" so much admired by Powys (L. 230) could be an example of the success of this method although this might be reading it too seriously:

A man I never saw before  
Is sitting on the parlour floor  
He neither speaks nor goes away—  
He has nowhere to go and nothing to say.

My Uncle who has travelled wide  
Regards our visitor with pride,  
And claims that even in Cathay  
They either Speak or Go Away.

And Sister, who is Uncle's Niece,  
Is all for calling the Police,  
But Mother really hates a row—  
So we never use the parlour now.<sup>24</sup>

The wry tone of these verses, especially the

last line, is characteristic of Hopkins' poetry. It is even noticeable in his treatment of such a subject as the death of one's love in an air-raid:

Looking for my love among the ruins  
I hear a voice calling that says  
"I am the Officer in Charge of The Incident."<sup>25</sup>

an ending not without reverberations but oddly detached. This detachment can lead to some elegant and amusing poems but it is not the stuff out which the "heavily magical" is made.

Inevitably, since attitudes to life and love are related, there is the same sort of incompatibility between the love poetry of these two writers, rooted of course in their different attitudes to women and sex. Powys, as novelist and poet, is more concerned with women's spirits and psychology, dwelling on their mysteriousness, their elusiveness, their essential untouchedness. He is fascinated by their nature, as he sees it, finer, more integrated, at once more instinctive, realistic and spiritual than that of men, and what interests him, once more, is "what is beyond? what is beyond?" Sexuality is interesting to Powys rather than the act of sex itself (his approach to the subject being unusually subtle and profound). Powys makes no secret of his sexual peculiarities. He writes extensively of his "cerebral sadism" in his *Autobiography*<sup>26</sup> and elsewhere, and of his disinclination if not inability to consummate sexual relationship in the normal way.<sup>27</sup> In L. 20 he writes of how the very idea of "naked embraces" freezes his sex-urge: "I am . . . so extreme a pervert and a degenerate in these things that both honest nakedness & downright copulation . . . always *chokes me off* for 24 hours." There is, moreover to Powys (as to so many before him) a positive value in abstinence and thwarted sexuality. Powys is by no means insensitive or unsympathetic to the normal, as the chapter 'Consummation' in *A Glastonbury Romance* shows. At the same time he is able to accommodate aberrations in

sexual behaviour and feeling with compassion and understanding.

Against this background the straightforward amorousness of Hopkins' love poetry and the arch lustfulness of some of his remarks in the course of the correspondence seem highly incongruous. In his approach to women Hopkins identifies with Louis Wilkinson whom he has quoted as saying, "The little darlings, they should never be allowed out of bed." The incompatibility between their approaches is indicated more than once by Powys, as in L. 20 quoted above. It seems that on the whole he found Hopkins' sexual directness upsetting. On the other hand, however, not altogether unexpectedly, there is an element of voyeurism on Powys's part. He sends his "humble gratitude" to Margaret whose attractions were being described and whose sexual generosity more than indicated. "It is warming to my old bones," he writes, "to hear of all these darlings," and again, "I'm a regular Pandarus." So he both deplores and encourages Hopkins' sexual pre-occupations and confidence, while Hopkins for his part obligingly modifies his ideal sex-object from "a lusty wench, deep-bosomed, broad-hipped, black-eyed and merry" (L. 33) to "a peeled willow-wand" (L. 41).

Another cause of tension between the two is that concerning the elements of tradition and originality in Hopkins' work. In the Foreword he wrote for Hopkins in March, 1938, Powys writes: "for all his passion to write in the old tradition and for all his claudicant sense of the old effects there is in his work a tone, a touch an overtone, an undertouch *entirely his own*, the style and fashion and manner and music of Kenneth Hopkins of none other,"<sup>28</sup> and he frequently praises the originality of his verses. Equally frequently, however, he writes of Hopkins' similarities to other poets: Shakespeare, Milton, Catullus, Marlowe, Donne, prior etc., and, most infuriating of all, T.S. Eliot. These similarities, or rather any suggestion of influence on his own poetry, except from case of Shakespeare and Donne, are indignantly refuted by

Hopkins. "When I began to write poetry seriously I *deliberately* avoided the great names lest I fell under their influence. I can put my hand to my heart and swear that my poetry, good or bad, is *mine, mine, mine* (L. 60)." Similarly, twenty-six years later, he writes in the Preface to his *Collected Poems*: "I have in particular remained outside the factions and movements which have engaged the poets of my generation. In the main, I have not been much influenced, I think, by any of my own contemporaries nor by the older poets who were influencing them." Any idea of influence then, was usually firmly refuted. Suggestions of Hopkins' resemblances to major poets, however, were more welcome, especially in the case of Keats. In fact in appearance, background and personality Hopkins does seem to have shown some similarity. Miss Playter was struck by it and Powys comments on it more than once in the letters and in his journals. That Hopkins himself was aware of a possible analogy is evident. Perhaps he is remembering Keats' dictum about poetry coming as naturally as leaves on a tree, when he writes, "I never write poetry unless 'I feel like it' unless it flows and needs not to be made up" (L. 24). In his autobiography he writes, after several previous competitive assertions, "I was now not only writing more sonnets than Keats, but writing them faster."<sup>29</sup> This regard for spontaneity is one feature that Hopkins has in common with Powys. "Just dash your *meaning* off at top speed," advises Powys with regard to prose style (L. 29), and several times in this correspondence and elsewhere he declares he is not an artist, in the sense of one who takes care over his creations, at all. "John the Heedless Blurter" pours scorn on those prose writers who take conscious pains over their prose style or rather who deliberately affect a style (L. 229). In the early letters, in particular L. 30, Hopkins seems inclined to rate quantity over quality and to have no very high regard for poetic discipline. Later, however, Powys becomes conscious of Hopkins' powers of organization and condensation, seeming to regret his own shortcomings in this respect:

"I really think my dear Kenneth you are wonderful in your power to *condense* exciting & important & historical situations in the very minimum number of words. I especially admire this quality in a writer as it is one . . . that I've never myself been able to acquire" (L. 286).

There is another marked discrepancy between the two in their literary tastes, although there is some over-lapping. Powys is drawn to his own like, Dostoevsky, Rabelais, Dickens, Hardy, the magnificos of fiction, all great, expansive writers, generous and profound: Hopkins is drawn to the unknown and the under-estimated. On the whole these are relatively slight writers such as Herrick, Prior, William Browne, Peter Pindar, Campion, Taylor the Water Poet and so on, satirical or lyrical, archly or delicately amorous, wistfully aware of "frail joys begun and ended with the day."<sup>30</sup> These are qualities found in his own poetry. In L. 169, he comments on his preference for minor poets:

I grub among odds and sods of literature and come on pleasant things. Praed and Prior have excellences found nowhere else so perfectly: so we go to them, or lose something worth having . . . everything published will find readers, even if but a few. This is consolation for some of us who do not bulk large in the world's eye!

Much of the difference in literary tastes and ideas is due to the wide divergence in age, class and education. The difference in age is self-evident, but it is probably relevant to discuss the difference in class, which includes here, of course, culture. Powys was a member of a relatively rich and cultured upper-class family; one of 'the gentry'. His father was a wealthy clergyman connected with the barony of Lilford, and his mother's family were connected with both Donne and Cowper. The children's love of literature was instilled into them by their mother, a widely-read, intelligent and sensitive woman. There must have been also as the children grew up, an increasing sense of how remarkable they were as a family, stimulating and encouraging each other to a level of creativity surely never surpassed in

one family.<sup>31</sup> The English upper-class assurance of superiority, fortified by family feeling, which produced a complex shame in Powys could never be truly eradicated, try as he might. Inherent in his works is an unconscious assumption of this superiority,<sup>32</sup> an assumption that is carelessly revealed in his remark to Hopkins about Ron Hall and his wife: "they are . . . I suppose what we might call proletarians or working people" (L. 253). Part of the basis of this feeling is the existence of a high standard of education and culture, an advantage that Powys would certainly have had, even if he had not attended Sherborne and Christ's College, Cambridge. Naturally this background, together with his vast reading and sense of his extraordinary gifts, led to great intellectual confidence, though not arrogance, on his part.

This confidence, conducive to both relaxation and power, is less likely to belong to a man of Hopkins' working-class background.<sup>33</sup> He left school at fourteen, to be apprenticed to a Builder's Merchant, and, while a great reader and bibliophile, a dweller amongst the all but untrodden ways of literature, he is relatively self educated and lacking in formal training. This must have contributed to his deliberate and permanent neglect of many of the classics of English literature.

Given these differences in age and background it is not surprising therefore that there should be some element of condescension on Powys's part and of humility or even obsequiousness in some of the early letters of Hopkins. Some crassness, too, was necessary, perhaps, to get the letters written at all. The gentleness of Powys's response contrasts markedly with the overweening tone of some of his brother Llewelyn's letters. Writing to Hopkins on December 5 1935, Llewelyn Powys declares:

You have much to learn. I have seldom received a more foolishly facetious letter than your first to me . . . You must avoid being cheap and assertive.<sup>34</sup>

When asked why he endured such arrogance Hopkins replied:

When you only know one famous chap you stick close and hope to survive the encounter . . . I deserve many of his reproofing observations, and those I felt were undeserved I put up with. You must remember that forty years ago England was even more class conscious than it is today and Llewelyn's upbringing had not taught him how to deal with a lad not of his own station in life; nor did the lad ever forget that this was an educated gentleman to be approached with circumspection. If I had had a forelock I would have tugged it.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps this is a sort of opportunism, the wren on the tail of an eagle (as Powys said Ron Hall was not, L. 253), and something of this approach appears in certain false syllogisms that Hopkins makes, drawing greatness to himself by association. For example the suggestion, in L. 58, that since Homer was not recognized in his life-time and Hopkins is not recognized in his, then Hopkins is comparable to Homer, or, more generally, since all the best poets are unsuccessful, this puts Hopkins amongst their number. However, the disingenuous cry, "God keep me from being successful!" (L. 41) that follows from this argument rises not so much from the fear of success as from the fear of failure. The hunger for fame is not so much a part of Powys's make-up, even though he would agree with his brother Theodore that "we all like to be praised". He is more the type of egotist that is concerned with expressing himself than in drawing attention to himself.

This urge to self-expression and self-display is very obvious, of course, in his *Autobiography*. Thus it comes as a surprise to find him extravagantly praising Hopkins' autobiography on account of the way Hopkins really faces himself as he, Powys, never did (L. 262). Anyone who compares the two books will find it hard to understand what he could be talking about. "A light-hearted and superficial account of my day,"<sup>36</sup> Hopkins' work is slight indeed although certainly amusing. It is an account of small triumphs and disasters, full of the unabashed tottings-up of L.s.d. of one on the dole. He can laugh at himself certainly and make capital out of his own

youthful absurdity and he is unflinching in his portrayal of his table manners and general sloppy ways, but there is nothing here to compare with the profound and delicate self-probings of Powys's *Autobiography*. It must be assumed however that Powys is talking about something when he says that Hopkins has done what he had never dared to do, drawing the distinction between them that all his self-exploitation was done in order to escape from himself:

Our difference is that my whole life has been spent in *running away from myself* and escaping *from myself* in the exploitation of myself! Yes at the bottom of it all I am insane—yes! stark staring *mad* & have always known that the Worst Hell for me would be to face myself. (L. 262)

What it was to which he dared not face up must presumably remain in the realm of speculation, unless, though this is unlikely, it is the idea of his own insignificance. He could see himself as absurd, certainly, in a Gargantuan way, but perhaps not as unimportant. "Aye! what a fellow you are for making short of your wone self!" he writes to Hopkins (L. 42) and in a letter to Clifford Tolchard dated August 28, 1942,<sup>37</sup> he writes of the "perfectly amazing humility" of the young generation. Possibly this sense of unimportance or something like this, is the basis of the fear to face up to which would mean madness: that we are after all, nothing?

Much has been said of Powys's attitude to Hopkins. The regard of the younger writer for the old master is a far less complex matter. There can be no doubt that he loved and respected him with all his heart, as a truly great man, a king amongst men and amongst writers. There is no hint of reproach or criticism in any of his letters even when there was indeed cause for at least disappointment, as in Powys's consistent refusal to allow him any material to edit. "All your no's duly noted", he writes with rueful good humour. The extent to which he loved and honoured him can be seen in the sonnet which is the Dedication of Hopkins' *English Poetry: A Short History*<sup>38</sup>:



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# Ned Thomas

## Obstinate Cymric

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My reading of John Cowper Powys's *Obstinate Cymric*—where he circles around his notion of Wales—provoked the following responses, sometimes concurrently:

1. Exasperation. Does any nation deserve to have inflicted on it the zanier projections of the romantic imagination?

2. Here is a harmless kind of old aboriginal, quite capable of stepping out of his romantic clothes and even laughing at himself.

3. He does, after all, give sound evidence of having lived in Wales; he has observed certain social formations accurately and intuited certain elusive tones.

4. In the end, it's not to us, the Welsh, that he speaks, at least not today.

Before I illustrate, let me try to suggest a framework within which one might hope to understand such a phenomenon as J. C. Powys. It involves starting off far from his own kind of language, but I hope readers will bear with me long enough to find that my aim is not reductionist. It is not a case of 'explaining him away'.

The starting-point is "uneven spatial development", a term in increasingly common use among those economists and sociologists who have broadened their enquiry from the internal and class relations of a given society, to include the relationship of dominance and dependence which can exist between peoples occupying distinct territories, whether or not these form part of the same nation-state. This may seem pretty arid ground to Powysites, but it offers a way into otherwise difficult problems. It helps us, for instance, to understand some of the similar pressures that may underlie rhetorically different

nationalisms, and it would be strange if it did not also cast some light on cultural history.

The accelerating development of nineteenth and twentieth century Britain has produced an increasingly organized and integrated English culture. Railways, London newspapers, state education, literacy, the mass-media, perhaps even the English novel, are among the agents of this integration. At the Celtic peripheries an eventual resistance to the process now enables us to see it in terms of erosion and attempted assimilation of the local culture. In England itself, a lesser degree of concern probably testifies to the greater effectiveness of the assimilative process.

Late in the day, the periphery produces a defensive reaction in the form of cultural and political nationalism. There is an ambivalence about this movement, well registered in Tom Nairn's essay "The Modern Janus": in the name of an ancient and traditional culture, nationalism undertakes the rapid modernization and organization of group consciousness. Meanwhile, there is a parallel ambivalence within the *dominant* culture, and it is somewhere within *that* area of ambivalence that we must situate J. C. Powys.

"Dominant cultures in security" writes Colette Guillaumin, a French sociologist, "do not perceive themselves as one culture among many, but as the universal culture". As a generalization, that is, I think true enough. They do, however, perceive areas of darkness on the periphery of their culture, and as that culture becomes more mechanized and their consciousness more strained by what David Jones calls "the bland megalopolitan light", so the areas of darkness come to seem specially attractive,

to offer opportunities for expanding consciousness.

Now, of course, there may be some actual distinctive features—landscape, language, social differentiation—that might or might not offer reasonable grounds to prefer a different place and way of life. But it is rarely possible for the visitor from a dominant culture—however sympathetic his intentions—to make this reasonable choice. He perceives as opaque what is transparent to the inhabitants of that other world, as mystically significant what is historically interesting. In the magic mirror he perceives his own face transformed. He needs the darkness, for were it to be illuminated he might find himself in a daylight world with socio-economic and political problems all too familiar in the world he came from. In Lawrence's *St Mawr*, the swarthy Lewis is a Welshman, and his fellow-groom a Mexican Indian, not because Lawrence knows anything about the societies these men come from, but precisely because he does *not*.

But by definition, those who explore the dark edges of their own over-conscious culture, are likely to be deeply intuitive people, and one could not withhold that epithet from John Cowper Powys or Lawrence, nor even from Arnold. Their intuitions are rarely at fault, but when they try to make sense of these intuitions, to fit them into some kind of order, they immediately reveal themselves as prisoners of the mechanistic thinking from which they seek to escape. This is bound to be more true in their more discursive writing.

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It is time to quote from J. C. P. and to comment directly, but a mixture of piety and tact prevents me from sending up the most ludicrous passages. What can one say about his attempts to isolate the aboriginal, pre-Celtic, qualities of the Welsh people except that in the turn of the century there was a great deal of confusion in the discussion of "race" and "culture", and that J. C. P. never seems to have got beyond

those confusions of his youth. Let the following passage stand as typical of the attempt to bolster intuition with phoney history, false logic and a-historical generalization:

As a matter of fact I am sure that the Irish are more Celtic than the Welsh! But we have the highest Roman authority for the statement that it was from Britain that the Gauls learnt their Druidic philosophy; and whatever, historically, this mysterious Druidic culture was, one cannot help suspecting that it came into being when the more expressive and certainly more belligerent Celts came under the intellectual domination of the deeply original civilization they outwardly subdued.

That the Irish are more Celtic than the Welsh is proved by the zealous, expansive and political skill with which they have proclaimed their 'Irishness' to the world.

Well this kind of lunacy does no-one any harm, you may say, but in fact it does lead to distortion. If he finds that Welsh people have difficulty in translating *written* Welsh into English, though they *speak* both languages well, there is no chance that he might consider the school system as in any way a contributory cause; rather "it is as if the written language were still the special prerogative of the Bards, with something sacred and secret and recondite about it, that could not be explained to the stranger except in a vague and indirect manner". It can't be a healthy thing for any society to have much of this kind of unreality in the air.

If only he would stick to his own observations and institutions, without appealing to Sir John Rhys, Professor Fleure, supposed patterns of pre-history, supposed similarities between the Welsh and the Chinese or the Americans! He is on firm ground when he remarks on the non-existence in rural Wales of the upper middle class which in Dorset he had found set the dominant note to life; and much of what he says about Welsh religion is deeply suggestive and depends on experience, not theory: "My own feeling is that Welsh

Christianity, like Russian Christianity, is such a subtle and spiritual evocation that—merely as a human phenomenon—it is worth a great deal of aristocratic secular culture.”

That remark, you may say, is worth a great deal of woolly theory. But is the English reader going to be able to distinguish the two elements, and is the Welsh reader going to trouble to?

Any animosity one might feel towards Powys vanishes when his anarchism and humour take over. Despite his appeals to the scholars, he is not, like Arnold, a systematizer, and there is no danger that he will try to co-opt the Welsh to the idea of Britain or to any other idea. There is a nice note of self-consciousness about his own purpose when he remarks of the chapter-house of Valle Crucis Abbey that “it would be easily possible to make use of this scholastic sanctuary not only for Thibetan contemplation but for the writing of books”, and one warms thoroughly to him when he admits, seeing the crowded buses going off to the cinemas at Rhyl: “Men and women must feel on all sides here the poetic weight of a hoary antiquity from which it is essential to take a vacation sometimes” and later, when he shows immense self-knowledge: “but I have so long tried to live like the Ousel of Gilgwri under the Sixth Avenue ‘Elevated’ of New York, that it is more permissible for me than for them [the Welsh] to continue undisturbed the quest for Mabon the son of Modron”.

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“Here—and it goes much deeper than ‘culture’—is what I came to Wales to find, and have found; namely a link between the spring-time of christendom and our modern age; a link which the potent centuries that come between have buried so deep.” There he says it all. There are things in Wales that he did not come to find, so he did not find them. There are things that exist because of a given historical experience which he wrongly attributes to age-old and mystical causes. There are, again, things which he

properly draws attention to and which are not readily explained in other ways. Even apostles of historical theory and of uneven spatial development will admit that there are cultural strata of great antiquity which can be reactivated when long thought dead, and which it may take a non-historical eye to pick out.

The last quotation shows that Powys’s allegiance is to something “deeper than culture” which he elsewhere further defines as “more diffused than tradition, wider than language”. We are on the borders of that about which Wittgenstein supposed one had better be silent, and it is with a sense of complete bathos that we find these farthest shores after all inhabited by something called “the Welsh character”. And this is a characteristic lapse. Time and again great draughts of nature blow themselves out in half-baked definitions of national character:

Behind our little houses the sombre mass of the Berwyn Mountains extends for an incredible distance, lifting its huge heather-covered bastions, ridge above ridge, like a cyclopean wall between England and Wales. Luckily the ascent to this vast heathery tableland of desolation is a gradual one, so that it is not hard to reach a point where you find yourself isolated from all human contact, mounted in a hunched shoulder of this huge globe, where by reason of the purplish darkness around you, emanating from the masses of trackless heather, you get the sensation, especially after the sun has gone down, of being the last survivor of your race on this swart promontory, while beneath you the “black earth”, as Homer somewhere calls it, sails on her path, dark and scarred and enduring, under the godless vault of superincumbent space.

Who does not respond to that? But the next paragraph opens: “There seems no doubt that there exists in Wales a deep tradition of pre-historic understanding between the mountains and the people . . .” and in no time we are into Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal and Neanthropic man, and Professor Fleure and Sir John Rhys, and

Iberians and Celts. Was it for this we climbed the Berwyns?

The relation of numinous to social and historical experience must always offer special difficulties. Success in my view consists in getting the 'match' right: in asserting the one without distortion of the other. It should be clear by now that I am not one who thinks everything explained by historical process and uneven spatial development; but the numinous, if it is to be convincing, has not to disregard these dimensions. In these essays, Powys founders because he has to work with a subjective numinous experience and an objectified and simplified notion of Wales. However much he attempts to identify with Wales, it remains material which he can take or leave, as he advises Anglo-Welsh writers to do. And he goes on his way with "Hallelujah I'm a bum in a pluralistic, strung-along, irrational multiverse."

Fare forward, voyager! This is a way we have all wanted to take at some time, but

there is another way whose appeal is stronger in this generation in Wales. It is the way of those who kept the fire going on the hearth (J. C. P. would understand that). With all the temptations to stridency, bitterness and rhetoric which this other way offers in the modern Welsh context, it yet allows that match of the social and the numinous sometimes to occur, for the social experience like the numinous has acquired a fully internalized dimension.

Beth yw bod yn genedl? Dawn  
Yn nwn y galon.  
Beth yw gwladgarwch? Cadw tŷ  
Mewn cwmwl tystion.

(Waldo Williams)

(What is being a nation? A talent  
In the deepest places of the heart.  
What is love of country? Keeping house  
In a cloud of witnesses.)

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# Elmar Schenkel

## John Cowper Powys: The Literary Reception in Germany

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In contrast to the situation in France of recent years, Powys's work has not yet met with much acclaim in Germany and remains largely unknown, even in the academic world. Apart from *Wolf Solent* and a few excerpts, nothing has been translated so far and there are at present no palpable signs of a renewed interest. Yet if interest should awaken—under the impact of the ecological crisis and the corollary emergence of new attitudes towards nature and spirituality—it would not be altogether without a history. Subterranean and sparse though the reception of Powys in Germany has been (and for most of the time bargained on the black markets of insider information), it nevertheless reaches, again in contrast to the French reception, far back into the country's history, and has not been devoid of highlights.

Understandably, it begins with the translation of *Wolf Solent* in 1930. Four years later, there were at least three people in Vienna who frequently discussed the novel and were deeply impressed by it—Hermann Broch, Elias Canetti and Anna Mahler (Gustav Mahler's daughter, then married to Paul Zsolnay, who published the translation). It seems that even a translation of *A Glastonbury Romance* was completed but remained unpublished for financial reasons.<sup>1</sup> The translation was followed by a number of reviews. One of the earliest must have been by Max Brod, the Prague writer and friend of Franz Kafka, who throughout his life kept attached to Powys's novel and seems to have had some correspondence with its author.<sup>2</sup> Another sympathetic review appeared in the *Berliner Tageblatt* by Horst Lange, who was a novelist himself and claimed that his novel *Schwarze Weiden* had been written under the in-

fluence of *Wolf Solent*.<sup>3</sup> Hans Henny Jahn, that eminent and congenial writer, published another review in *Der Kreis* (January 1932) praising the uninhibited creation of landscape, flesh and spirit, and the amoral vision of the novel. Powys was mentioned by him in further articles on contemporary writing and once listed, in terms of relevance, with Bernanos, Kafka and Faulkner.<sup>4</sup> As is well known, Jahn later became President of the Freie Akademie der Kuenste in Hamburg, which awarded its Bronze Plaque to Powys in 1957.

Another example of the impact the translation had among writers is Hermann Hesse, who read *Wolf Solent* with the "deepest concern" but could not follow the later work because of language problems<sup>5</sup>—thus sharing the fate of numerous German writers of the period who were, for political and educational reasons, condemned to a sort of linguistic provincialism. Apart from these public acknowledgements, there were other, more isolated and private, contacts, possibly epitomized by a friend of Horst Lange's, the Silesian sculptor Joachim Karsch, who was so much intrigued by *Wolf Solent* that he started a correspondence with Powys and made a couple of illustrations of the novel, which he sent to Powys. His enthusiasm went so far as to make him draw a portrait of John Cowper based on photos he had received from him.<sup>6</sup>

The academic world of the thirties, deeply entrenched in ideological warfare, concentrated on aspects in Powys's work that seemed aptly to correspond to its own fascist preoccupation. Thus the first books (by Bernhard Fehr)<sup>7</sup> which mentioned and discussed Powys focussed on the "Blut und

Boden" potential of the work, stressing the importance of racial ties, blood, magic, atavism, charismatic powers, attacks on civilisation (a word with quite a different ring in German), entailing and favourably appraising the resurrection of a new Dark Age, while the view of the novels' characters was informed by a dichotomy between the weak and the strong. A review of the *Autobiography* and an article about the Powys family by Karl Arns<sup>8</sup> followed Fehr in applying the term "magische Epik" to the works of the Powys family (comparing it to Mary Webb's) as products of the "Celtic mind". It is an important part of the fascist paranoia to resort to hygienic measures of interpretation as soon as the totalitarian impulse is threatened by the exuberance of life. Powys presented (and still does) such a problem of exuberance to academic thinking. Hence, understandably, Arns found "most strange" the names Powys gave himself in the *Autobiography*: "Idol-worshipper, . . . secret Rosicrucian, champion of Jews, Communists, Catholics and Negroes . . ." Later on, in 1942, in a review of *The Pleasures of Literature*, he felt uneasy about the fact that Powys turns "political" when pitting Whitman and Nietzsche against the "new blood-and-iron-State".<sup>10</sup> Given these cultural and ideological conditions which are still, latently and potentially, bearing on the present, any future German reception and discussion of Powys's work will not be valid if it cannot come to terms with this part of its history.

For over a decade, then, there was no sign of interest in Powys's work—building and re-organising assumed the function of restoring the shattered German identity. It is only in the mid-fifties that a group of writers and students around Hans Henny Jahnn and Ernst Kreuder revived the attention, apparently to counterbalance a certain over-materialistic mentality then spreading widely in Germany in the wake of the "economic (or "hollow") miracle". There were discussions in Diederichs Verlag whether further translations could be undertaken (1954). Powys was asked to

become a member of the well-renowned Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaft und der Literatur in Mainz—an offer which he had to reject in the summer of 1954 due to old age. Yet interest was awakened and eventually led to the award of the Hamburg Bronze Plaque in 1957 which occasioned Rolf Italiaander's visit to Blaenau-Ffestiniog on behalf of the Freie Akademie der Kuenste in Hamburg (originally, H. H. Jahnn, who had fallen ill, was to accompany him) and a letter from Jahnn to Powys,<sup>11</sup> which emphasized the Plaque's value: "Before you, dear John Cowper Powys, Thomas Mann and the composer Frau Ilse Fromm-Michaels, have received this plaque. The worth (sic) of our modest gift is increased by your being the third person to accept this honour." The 1958 issue of the Academy's year-book ("Elbe") prints Italiaander's account of his visit to North Wales as well as translated excerpts from the *Autobiography* ("The truth was, I got from my visit to Hamburg a sort of accentuation of my secret life-cult", pp. 301-7), from *The Brazen Head* and from *Wolf Solent*. It also contains facsimile lines of Powys's letter to the Academy: "This is the first time in my life that I have received any Public Honour and my gratitude to the Freien Akademie Der Kuenste in Hamburg is boundless. I want to express my excited gratitude to all the Writers, Composers and Painters, Sculptors, Architects of the Hamburg Akademie der Kuenste". A photograph taken by Rolf Italiaander on July 7, 1957, is included in the volume too.

1957 and 1958 were years of coincidences. The translation of *Wolf Solent* by Richard Hoffmann was re-issued by Zsolnay Verlag and taken over in 1960 by Moderner Buchclub Darmstadt. Wolfgang Kehr from Marburg University—himself associated with the Jahnn-Kreuder literary circle and one of the first to stimulate interest in Powys—concluded the first German doctoral dissertation on Powys: "John Cowper Powys—Leben, Weltanschauung, episches Werk". The dissertation of Kehr, who, while preparing it, visited Powys in Corwen and had some correspondence with

him for a couple of years, gave a first overall view of Powys's work, in particular discussing the philosophic, literary and occult influences bearing on it.

The spirit of the sixties, with their problems of re-defining the social system and its impact on the individual, left little space for curiosity regarding the seemingly off-beat tune of Powys's fiction. Yet Rowohlt Verlag, then under the direction of F. J. Raddatz, studied the possibility of further translations—a plan that was turned down because of the financial risk.<sup>12</sup> As an outcome, as it were, of this investigation, Prof. Raddatz published an essay on Powys with the title "Verstellte Wirklichkeiten" ("obstructed realities"),<sup>13</sup> introducing *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, and *Autobiography* to German readers in the light of a socially oriented criticism, unearthing contradictions and the co-existence of utterly outdated writing with very modern and intriguing visions of man. A second

doctoral dissertation on Powys was completed in 1972 by Karl Hepfer of Hamburg University,<sup>14</sup> which concentrated on the use of myths in Powys's novels and evaluated the texts from a Jungian perspective. The most recent article I have found is a rather extensive entry in Kindlers Literatur Lexikon (1975) discussing the ambiguous and difficult quality of *A Glastonbury Romance*.<sup>15</sup>

It is possible that these fluctuations in the literary reception of Powys's works in Germany can serve as an example of how any literary acclaim is intricately linked up with the historical situation from which it emerges, throwing into relief in accordance with its own movement the respective parts of the fictional "message"—thus instancing "the indissoluble bond of the examining process with the examined" (G. Steiner).

They also have shown, I think, that there is still a great potential of response in this country.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Elias Canetti for this information, given in a letter dated September 6, 1978. (Mr Canetti is the author of *Auto da fé* and *Crowds and Power*.)

<sup>2</sup>Rolf Italiaander in his contribution to the yearbook of the Freie Akademie der Kuenste in Hamburg 1958 says that Brod had called Powys "one of the greatest writers of our age" in 1930—I have not been able to find out more about this. But Brod mentions Powys later on in his novel *Rebellische Herzen* (1957), in his autobiography *Streitbares Leben* (Muenchen, 1960)—listing Powys with Flaubert, Mahler, R. Walser and Hofmannsthal (p. 373), with remarks on *Wolf Solent* and his correspondence with Powys (p. 396)—and in his philosophical treatise *Von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (Stuttgart, 1969, p. 104).

<sup>3</sup>Horst Lange in a letter dated June 28, 1954, to Wolfgang Kehr. Much of this survey would not have been possible without the kind assistance and help, especially the access to his correspondence, of Prof. Wolfgang Kehr, now Director of Freiburg University Library.

<sup>4</sup>"Die Abgruende vor uns", *Wir heissen euch hoffen, Schriftsteller zur deutschen Verstaendigung*, Muenchen, 1951, pp. 44-5; also: "Aufgabe des Dichters in dieser Zeit", *Der Kreis*, Hamburg, May 1932; all reprinted in H. H. Jahnn, *Werke und Tagebuecher* (Vol 7), Hamburg, 1974.

<sup>5</sup>Hermann Hesse on a postcard to Wolfgang Kehr, dated March 8, 1955.

<sup>6</sup>*Briefe des Bildhauers Joachim Karsch aus den Jahren 1933-1945*, ed. Fritz Sonntag, Berlin, 1948; on Powys: pp. 17, 27, 29, 30-1, 33-4, 41, 53-4, 66-7, 122-3; the illustrations referred to represent 20 heads of characters in *Wolf Solent* made in September 1937; the portrait of Powys was made in February/March 1938 a copy of which was sent to Powys. So far, I have not been able to trace any of these items, which probably got lost during the war.

<sup>7</sup>Bernhard Fehr, *Das England von heute*, Leipzig, 1932, pp. 96-99; and *Die englische Literatur der heutigen Stunde*, Leipzig, 1934, pp. 83-93.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Arns, Review of the *Autobiography* in *Englische Studien*, 69, 1935, pp. 418-9; "Die Geschwister Powys", *ibid.*, pp. 367-372.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Arns, Review of *The Pleasures of Literature*, *Englische Studien*, 75, 1942, pp. 112-3. See *The Pleasures*, 1938, pp. 477, 565.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys—a record of achievement*, London, 1966, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup>F. J. Raddatz in a letter to me, dated August 11, 1978.

<sup>13</sup>"Verstellte Wirklichkeiten", *Frankfurter Hefte*, 20, 1965, pp. 775-83.

<sup>14</sup>"Der Mythos im Werk von John Cowper Powys", Dissertation, Hamburg, 1972.

<sup>15</sup>*Hauptwerke der englischen Literatur*, M. Pfister, Muenchen, 1975, pp. 468-9 (entry by Prof. Joerg Drews).

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## Reviews

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*The Saturnian Quest: John Cowper Powys—A Study of his Prose Works*,  
G. WILSON KNIGHT.  
The Harvester Press, 1978, £5.30.

When this book was first published in 1964 it was described (on title-page if not on dust-cover) as "A Chart of the prose works of John Cowper Powys" and there was no question but that it was a pioneer work in a field which then interested no more than a small number of percipient readers and critics. Another fourteen years have passed, however, and Powys studies have moved rapidly on, both as the result of the endeavours of members of the Powys Society and because more and more critics, not so firmly aligned, are aware of a writer in John Cowper who can hardly be ignored in terms of the twentieth century novel. I am accordingly less enthusiastic about the appearance of *The Saturnian Quest* in a second edition unrevised. Professor Wilson Knight says rather sadly in his brief preface that textual corrections have not been permitted (since this a photographed reproduction of the original) and that all he has been allowed is an *errata* list on page 132 (not 139 as stated). There is, it is true, something not previously included in Francis Berry's poem to "John Cowper Powys, ninety years old" on the obverse of the contents page, but Professor Wilson Knight would probably have wished to do much more than list his subsequent Powys studies and acknowledge the error of identity on pp. 82-84 pointed out by John Brebner's *The Demon Within*. Or if he did not so wish, then he should have done, because there are several respects in which his "chart of the prose works" is in need of revision. I suspect that the publishers' desire to rush this second edition out is not unconnected with the fact that Humanities Press of New Jersey are publishing it simultaneously and that an impact is ex-

pected in America on which the time-lag will have had less effect.

Unquestionably a book which in 1964 opened up what to many seemed a Powysian jungle, *The Saturnian Quest* analyses each novel and philosophic essay with plentiful quotation from the text and keeps the whole forest in view. A newcomer to Powys or a student anxious to find out either how best to tackle the entirety of the *oeuvre* or to choose the part most profitable to his aims would have realised that in the first edition he had a most valuable aid. And it would probably be foolish to deny that there are many readers or students in 1978 who could be served similarly. But the more experienced reader of John Cowper is bound, after so long, to feel that there are respects in which Professor Wilson Knight mis-emphasises and even mis-leads. The quotation from "The Saturnian" which fronts the preface points directly to one such mis-emphasis, for it does not mean, in the poem, what Professor Wilson Knight (in *Neglected Powers*, not in *The Saturnian Quest*) thinks it does. "The Saturnian" is about the quest for beauty, and if the poet is "cold to your human touch" it implies that human society (however personalised in J.C.P.'s usual manner) cannot hold him for long. Professor Wilson Knight, on the other hand, hammers away at John Cowper's own divergent sexuality and relentlessly nails down what are often merely aesthetic insights and preferences into a coherent doctrine of bi-sexuality.

It is, of course, natural that in making a chart one tends to emphasise similarities and recurrences as points of recognition for the inexperienced traveller. And in his 1964 Preface Professor Wilson Knight disarms a good deal of criticism by saying that what he has produced is not a critical discussion but an "interpretation"—by which he means "a sharp and defined exposition of the various themes and powers whose in-

terplay makes the literature" under scrutiny. Had he really adhered to this, the book might have been largely unexceptionable: argument would have been, as he rightly declares, confined to matters of emphasis. But in practice he has not been able to avoid judgments of value and he sprinkles them around in such fashion that the weaknesses of John Cowper Powys are not merely ignored but enlarged by duplication. It is as though the critic could do no other than take the author's world as it is and applaud it. One or two instances of this must suffice. Great book as *A Glastonbury Romance* is in many respects, one cannot really accept that in it the "manipulation of this vast concourse of themes and persons, treated simultaneously in width and in depth, is staggering, and the realism attained is remarkable". (p. 41) Realism demands some picture of society as it really is against the pattern of the Abbey Close, the Dyeworks and the Wells Road, and it is quite plain to any attentive reader of the novel that J.C.P. has little idea of society and its pressures and even less of the daily work by which such a society must support itself. Nobody in *A Glastonbury Romance* works in the sense of having to cooperate with other people and keep regular hours. What we see is a group of characters who are essentially *foci* of ethereal, ethical, even vegetable pressures—indeed any pressures except social—drawn out of a society that remains no more than an unrealised smudge beyond them. For example, when Mother Legge the procuress holds her Easter Monday party her inner room holds nobody but Owen Evans, John Crow and the narrator's inner ring of intuitives and degenerates and peculiars (Tom Barter's Clarissa Smith perhaps excepted): yet we are blandly expected to believe that these parties are *popular*, when there is virtually no supporting cast. All this would matter very much less if one did not talk about realism.

The underlining of this wrong emphasis becomes much heavier when the book approaches Wales and what Professor Wilson Knight calls Powys's "Golden Age". After

admitting (belatedly) that in the earlier novels "there was a certain discrepancy between externals and content in that modern realism was felt to bulge and creak from the pressure of eccentric Titans and cosmic powers" (p. 67), he declares that in *Owen Glendower* "we are aware primarily of human culture and human civilisation in exact historical perspective" (*ibid*). It is extraordinary that Professor Wilson Knight should remain blind to a serious Powysian miscalculation. For J.C.P. attempts in *Owen Glendower* to foist a deliberately individualist and passive philosophy upon a series of historical events which, if they do not express a *collective* will expressed in political and military action, remain meaningless. For John Cowper makes of Owen an inactive and contradictory figure who could not have motivated half a dozen gossoons to climb the nearest mountain let alone an army which, cold and half-starved, fought a guerilla war for the best part of fifteen years. And for supporting cast he offers, as usual, a ragged line of divergent intellectuals who could have been of small use in a rebellion. The strange thing is that Professor Wilson Knight perceives something of the same defect in *Porius*, on which, abandoning his purely interpretative stance, he is (if we consider the savage cuts made in the book as published) surprisingly hard. "The detailed historical knowledge", he writes, "is so dense that it clogs the action, and we are often more aware of historical atmosphere than of historical events" (p. 77). Even Merlin fails to please: "his thoughts and movements are heavy and cumbrous as the movement of the book in which he lives" (p. 79). Yet *Porius* improves on *Owen Glendower*, not in terms of the quantity of action but in the fact that the Arthur who must move but does not is largely off-stage and not central to the philosophy.

Towards the end of the book Professor Wilson Knight does indeed begin to talk back at J.C.P., to observe the contradictions and comment on them: the open-mouthed acceptance of the earlier chapters disappears. His survey remains, however, much more a plotting of themes

and the elements that make them up than an estimate of the success with which those themes are handled. In that sense he justifies his preface.

It may seem, doubtless, less than just not to set out at length the merits of an analysis that is usually careful and often enlightening and to omit to praise more than perfunctorily the quality of *The Saturnian Quest* as an introduction to the prose

works of John Cowper Powys. But it is precisely because the need for such an introduction has lessened that I would reiterate that the reappearance of the book unrevised can hardly be a service of anything like the same quality. Professor Wilson Knight might have been allowed or persuaded to set out his maturer conclusions in a new volume.

ROLAND MATHIAS

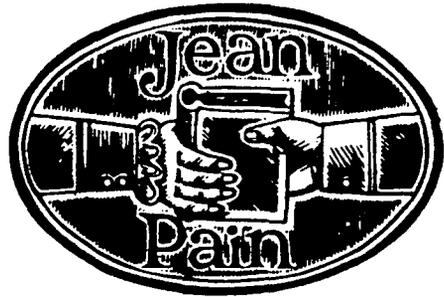
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## Letters to the Editor

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Mappowder  
5th December 1978

The Editor,  
*The Powys Review*

Preaching to the Poor-box

Dear Belinda Humfrey,

Peter Riley's essay on "T. F. Powys at Mappowder" (*PR*, 3) is of great interest. As an analysis of the writings it is persuasive but not entirely so. This is perhaps because much is taken over-seriously that Theodore would have taken with a chuckle and layer upon layer of whimsical reservation. This is especially evident in the exaggerated gravity with which the 'human' voices and conversations of inanimate objects in the *Fables* are considered. Peter Riley is very much aware of Theodore's irony but barely conscious of the continual play of humour which humanizes and redeems the mature work. This leads him I think to some distortion of T. F. Powys's vision as a whole.

However in this letter I wish rather to comment on his interpretation of the "silence" of the last years in Mappowder. Here he takes the writings as definitive in a static sense for the succeeding phase of literary withdrawal. I do not think this can be accepted without question. The writings reveal no doubt his inward state at the time of writing. But they also point to a resolution beyond that state rather than a mere intensification of it. This resolution—in the direction of religious faith, was—as Jeremy Hooker and Jack Clemo have recognised—implicit in the writings from the beginning.

Peter Riley's approach is an essay in the anatomy of melancholy. It is true that no analysis of the works can even start but from this basis. Vera Wainwright told me she had lent Theodore several of the works

of Kierkegaard. He summed up his response with the remark: "This Dane knows." Certainly one can think of very few readers who would understand in greater depth that subtlest and most penetrating of all anatomies of melancholy *The Sickness unto death*. Nevertheless just as Kierkegaard's work points beyond itself to a religious solution—so do the works of T. F. Powys—for those capable of understanding and interpreting religious language. And Theodore Powys's works are religious and written in religious language from beginning to end. On this basis I do not think the last years can be interpreted as an ever-deepening plunge into melancholy and spiritual isolation.

There is much to be said for understanding the writings less as an attempt at communication with others and more as an attempt at self-understanding: a diary written in cryptic hieroglyphs addressed to himself—a continuation of the *Soliloquies*. Theodore was essentially a religious contemplative seeking to realize his own mode of vision. His writings are merely incidental to this.

I have been told that he was at first very reluctant to publish and was only persuaded to do so by his brother John and his friend Sylvia Townsend Warner: and that he was more interested in the possibility that his stories might bring him in 'an honest penny' than in making a name in the literary world. Once it became clear his writings helped to solve no financial problems and were met with little understanding he lost interest in publication. To anyone who knew him this is entirely credible.

At the same time there is reason to think that some degree of resolution of his inner problems did take place sometime before he moved to Mappowder: a resolution that in its very nature involved "silence". His reading in the last years was almost entirely restricted to the Bible and Christian

devotional and mystical works. The marks he left in these books—Baxter, Jeremy Taylor, William Law, George Fox, John Wesley, Traherne, Eckhart, Boehme, St. John of the Cross, Tauler—are of decisive significance for an understanding of his inner life at this time. It is always the mystical 'way' of negation, of silence, of inwardly stripping to the barest essentials that receives emphasis. And I would say that all that Peter Riley discerns in the writings—though with a larger admixture of humour than he allows—reveals him not as static but as steadily moving in this direction throughout his life. The time came when there was no need to write: i.e. talk any more—even to himself. His stories had been for the most part stories he told himself. The story "The Scapegoat" you have just published reveals this clearly: a religious parable addressed to himself. His writing had done its work: his inner life now became, for him, what it was for Meister Eckhart: a closing of the eyes and lips to 'this world': in an understanding of mysticism strictly consonant with its classical meaning, and etymological derivation.

To see this as "an easy way out" with Rachel Trickett or with Peter Riley, as an unredeemed and unresolved solipsism, seems to be at least questionable as arising from a misunderstanding of the nature of religious language and symbolism. However that may be it is certain such an inner life involves much suffering and is concerned above all with redemption.

There remains—as I think of some

evidential value—the impression he left on others as a person in his last years. This impression was very far from being one of bleak and arid self-enclosure as Peter Riley's analysis would lead one to expect. He was an easy, gracious, sensitively-aware, life-giving and often most amusing companion. An all-pervasive whimsy, humour and kindness were the traits most in evidence. His sister Lucy always remarks on the extraordinary serenity that characterized him at this time.

I fancy that at the end he thought of his writings as a series of sermons he had once addressed to himself—which by chance one or two others may have overheard and for the most part misunderstood. I have a copy of Eckhart's sermons extensively marked by him.

At the end of the sermon titled "The Emanation and Return" he has underlined the following passage which can be taken as revealing much that underlay the "withdrawal and silence" of his years in Map-powder:

"When I go back into the ground, into the depths, into the wellspring of the Godhead, no one will ask me whence I came or whither I went . . . No one will ask me what I was doing . . .

"All happiness to those who have listened to this sermon. Had there been no one here I must have preached it to the poor-box."

"Well no matter now," Theodore might add, "the rest is silence."

Gerard Casey

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GERARD CASEY met J. C. Powys in 1936 and remained in touch with him until the end of his life. He was with him the day before his death and scattered his ashes on Chesil Beach. His conversations with J. C. P. almost always moved in a religious and philosophical direction and he has drawn on impressions gained in these conversations in writing the paper published here. His main publication is a long poem, *South Wales Echo* (Enitharmon, 1973), under the pseudonym Gerardus Cambrensis, which is largely the result of J. C. P.'s influence on his religious thinking. He translates modern Greek poetry, especially Seferis, and contributes essays to Quaker periodicals, to *The Mountain Path* (a periodical devoted to Hindu religion) and to *Studies in Comparative Religion*.

PATRICIA VAUGHAN DAWSON has contributed to numerous periodicals on the visual arts, written and collated a series of books and filmstrips for schools called *The Artist Looks at Life* (Visual Publications) and lectured at the Tate Gallery (1963-66). She has her own etching press and her prints are in public and private collections in Britain and abroad, including The British Museum and La Bibliothèque Nationale.

PETER EASINGWOOD lectures in English literature at the University of Dundee. He obtained a Ph.D. for a thesis on J. C. Powys in the University of Leeds, 1976.

IAN HAMILTON obtained the degree of M.Phil. from the University of Leicester in 1978 for a thesis on T. F. Powys.

JEREMY HOOKER lectures in English literature at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. His critical writings include *John Cowper Powys* (Writers of Wales Series, U.W.P., 1973), *David Jones: an exploratory study* and *John Cowper Powys and David Jones* (Enitharmon 1975 & 1978). He has published four volumes of his own poetry: *The Elements* (Christopher Davies, 1972), *Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant* (Enitharmon, 1974), *Solent Shore* (Carcenet, 1978) and *Landscape of the Daylight Moon* (Enitharmon, 1978).

TIMOTHY HYMAN is a painter. He contributes to various magazines on the visual arts and writes regularly on painting for the *London Magazine* and *Artscribe*.

ROLAND MATHIAS edited *The Anglo-Welsh Review* from 1951 to 1976. He is a historian, his publications including *Whitsun Riot* (1963). He is also a writer of short stories, and a poet, his four volumes of poetry including *Absalom in the Tree* (Gomer, 1971). His book editing has been various, from the stories of *Geraint Goodwin* (Gomer, 1978) to critical essays on *David Jones* (Gomer, 1976). His recent critical studies include *Vernon Watkins* (Writers of Wales Series, U.W.P., 1974) and his latest criticism of J. C. Powys is *The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk, J. C. Powys as a Poet* (Enitharmon, 1979).

ELMAR SCHENKEL works as a researcher on Old Provençal poetry in the French Department of Freiburg University, W. Germany, and is writing a doctoral thesis on John Cowper Powys. His publications include short stories and essays in *Nachcafé* and an article, "Hugo Kükelhaus und die Philosophie der Organerfahrung" in *Neue Rundschau*.

NED THOMAS lectures in English literature at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He is a prolific writer of reviews and articles on 20th century literature and on the politics of nationalism, utilising his earlier experience as a teacher at the universities of Salamanca and Moscow and as a leader writer for Times Newspapers. He is the editor of *Planet* (launched in 1970) and the author of *The Welsh Extremist—A Culture in Crisis* (Gollancz, 1971, rev. pb. ed. 1973, 1978).

SONIA TILSON, born in Swansea, Ph.D. Wales, emigrated to Canada in 1964, where she is a part-time lecturer at Carleton University, Ottawa.

J. M. TURNER is a librarian in the University of Exeter.

## CORRECTIONS TO P.R. 3

The Editor apologises for the misprints of some Greek letters in the transcriptions to Plates 3 and 9 of "John Cowper Powys's Inscriptions to Elsa Vaudrey". Fortunately, the texts are legible in the photographic plates of Powys's inscriptions which they accompany.

Notes to John Toft, "John Cowper Powys's *Atlantis*".

<sup>1</sup>*Homer and the Aether*, 1959, pp. 11, 19-20.

<sup>2</sup>*Atlantis*, 1954, pp. 436-437; 451-452. Subsequent numerals in parentheses in my text refer to this edition.

<sup>3</sup>*Inferno*, Canto XXVI, 11. 90-142 (Temple Classics translation).

<sup>4</sup>*The Pleasures of Literature*, 1938, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.77.

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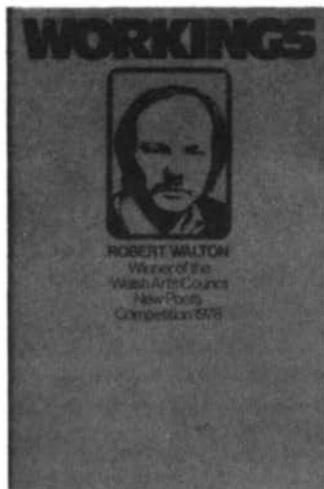
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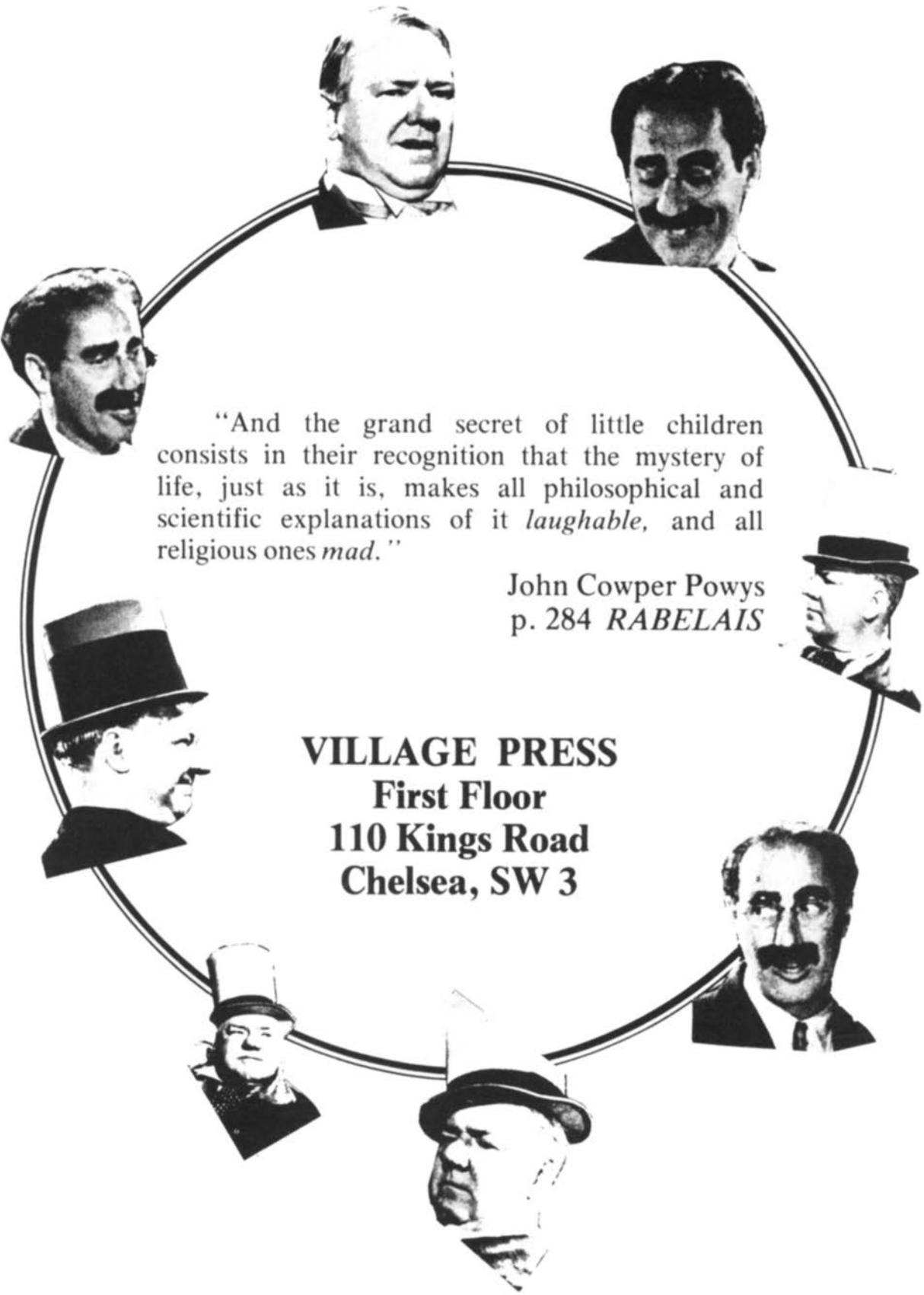
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John Cowper Powys  
p. 284 *RABELAIS*

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