

The Powys Review

NUMBER SEVEN



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Editorial

Perhaps the most interesting, certainly the most surprising publication in the Powys field during 1980 has been the novel, *After My Fashion*, apparently discarded by John Cowper Powys in 1919 but now brought forth in paperback by Pan Picador and acclaimed as supplying several missing ingredients to a proper understanding of Powys the novelist. Certainly in its fictional combination of his experiences of Sussex, New York and the aftermath of the First World War, experiences not treated elsewhere in his novels, and in its unfamiliar artistic treatment of some familiar Powys themes, *After My Fashion* has provoked some rethinking. We shall publish a series of reviews of this novel, from various viewpoints, in the next *Powys Review*, Number Eight.

Within the present *Review* we include discussions of some unexpected and unexplored subjects of John Cowper Powys's wide-spread interests, the politics of war, Taoism (particularly of the kind given by Kwang-Tze) and Zen. These subjects under Powys's pen enter some surprising relationships, not least being Zen with Wales and the Welsh. In addition here, we bring yet another, yet different kind of study in our series on *Wolf Solent*, John Cowper Powys's most popular novel. Then, with other Theodorian material, we are pleased to publish the second and final part, from manuscript, of the late Sylvia Townsend Warner's account of T. F. Powys. We have thus quite a mixed *Review*, stretching from Japan to East Chaldon.

This *Review* opens, however, with some poems by Mary Casey whose unexpected death early this year has been a great loss to many. We send special sympathy to her husband Gerard Casey and her mother, Lucy Penny, and other members of the

Powys family in Dorset and Kenya. As her friend, Glen Cavaliero has been asked to provide the *Review*'s tribute to Mary Casey. The poems published here were clearly not prepared or intended for publication, and they were mostly only discovered by Gerard Casey after his wife's death, for they were "tucked away in notebooks" or sent, with letters, to friends. But, because of the poems' subjects, the brothers and sisters Powys—Katie (Philippa), Llewelyn, Marian (May) and Theodore—and Llewelyn's wife, Alyse Gregory, they have been provided for the interest of readers of the Powyses' works. Mary Casey's most polished poetry was largely on Christian themes; a collection of her poems is to be published by the Enitharmon Press next year.

We also mourn the death this Spring of Harry Coombes, a generous and vigorous contributor to studies of T. F. Powys, through *T. F. Powys* (1960), still the only full critical book on this novelist, and, more recently, in lectures to the Powys Society. The Editor remembers especially his brilliantly memorable and enchanting, unscripted lecturing to undergraduate students on his other literary love, Edward Thomas. Q. D. Leavis has described him, in a letter to the Editor this year, as "that good, dear man Harry Coombes, an old and admirable friend and a fine and modest literary critic". We give our sympathy to his wife, Joy, and his children, the family to whom he gave indirect tribute through his recent (and posthumously published) recollections of John Cowper Powys.

In this issue we are grateful for information provided by E. E. Bissell, Francis Feather, Jeffrey Kwintner and Giles Wordsworth, and for photographs provided by Gerard Casey, Francis Powys, and Florian Karsch and Elmar Schenkel.

Mary Casey. A Tribute

All those who knew Mary Casey will have been saddened by her death, which took place in January of this year. She and her husband had returned to England from their Kenya farm, and were living in the tiny Dorset village of Mappowder, next door to her mother Lucy, the youngest and only surviving sister of the Powys brothers. Mappowder is secluded and beautiful, unobtrusively part of a landscape in which it seems to have taken root. It had been the home of Theodore Powys, and it therefore seems appropriate that so rare a person as Mary Casey should also come to live there. The winding lanes, the grey stone cottages and wayside trees, and most especially the calm slope of Bulbarrow, were things which seemed to reflect her personality.

That personality was more readily appreciated than defined. An eager sensitivity (recalling that of her aunt, Katie Powys) was what struck one first; her manner, both alert and shy, her concern for what you were doing, and her inherited capacity for remembering what you had done; sudden ripples of quiet laughter, a rueful amazement at the sophistications of the world—all these aspects of her were immediately apparent. But deeper things would surface as one got to know her better, for instance a loving, watchful delight in the natural world around her, in flowers, birds, the various moods of sky and weather. Thus, writing in September 1975, she notes that

Now we wait for autumn, the 'backend' as farmers not poetically used to call the season: September days can be a kind of standstill between summer and fall. Already I've seen the fields white with hoar frost, green leaves and grass blades splintery with rime: then the

half-warmth, bees and butterflies creep back, feebler but gay.

This sharp, attentive awareness was also a mark of vulnerability: she was very sensitive to cruelty and suffering. Equally strong, however, was her affection for, and appreciation of, her friends and family, never sentimental, often amused: to hear her talk about her uncles was to be aware of the perils of too literary a valuation on one's own part. I think she regarded the deliberations of the Powys Society as much with friendly merriment as with respect.

But what made her so fine a human being was, I believe, something more even than a personality both strong and loving: it was the sense of a spiritual ambience. That other dimension which the rest of us speak and write about so readily she seemed to experience at first hand. In this she was her uncles' niece. John Cowper's earth-mysticism could be perceived in her as she



walked on Eggardun or Maiden Castle; Theodore's deep sense of God would come out in some spontaneous and penetrating comment; while she was no less responsive to the grandeur of sea and sky than was Llewelyn. On the Dorset cliffs she rightly preferred to be silent: beauty such as that was made for communion, not for exclamations. Indeed silence seemed her element, a silence that was full, not empty.

She was learned in a devoted, unprofessional way, and wrote, but never published, three novels, one of them about Plotinus, the others about the Saxon king, Egbert, and Baldwin, Leper King of Jerusalem. She was working on a novel about Orpheus when she died. All these books were the product of meditation as well as scholarship; but it is in her poems that one draws nearest to her. She wrote as an act of self-discovery, not for self-display: like so much about her, she kept these gifts hidden. If I seem unduly to emphasise this quality of seclusion, it is because it rendered her giving of herself the more immediate and winning. Her hospitality was very genuine, so unostentatious that you made yourself at home without even thinking that you were doing so: her ac-

ceptance of you was as natural as that. She was tall, with short grey hair and the friendliest bright brown eyes; soft of speech, she had a way of disappearing before you noticed it—then there she would be, seated cross-legged on the grass beside you, her glance darting back and forth among the other speakers as she let them talk. She could be tart on occasion, astringent even; and was formidable to the extent that she would have no truck with pretentiousness or folly. A natural modesty might well cause her to shrink from such a tribute as this present one; but that is the price to be paid by those who inspire affection. She will be very greatly missed, and as she herself said in one of her poems,

this is the utmost penalty
to have learnt in drinking love
there is no Lethe.

For those who knew and loved Mary Casey the quiet, bitter-sweet irony of that can only be mitigated by the knowledge that her life endorsed it, through being the finely attuned and gracious thing it was.

Glen Cavaliero

Mary Casey

Poems for her uncles and aunts

Curlew in the vale at early day sea-
gulls in the ploughland and over the green
sheep starred cliff headlands gold green
Steeps and bottoms over blue ocean
cowslips in hand I stood over stone
carved fenced deep in drenched
grassblades held my yellow
sweet-sensed arrogances of flowers
to the proud engraved living

Llewelyn

8 June 1967

offerings
for L.P.

Here are pomegranates for you Llewelyn
sprung from the blood of the god Dionysus

out of Africa with a word and a stir
of kindred blood bright as you
stained your doorposts
long ago

all morning I copied poems
of Clare till all country England is here
these I bring with the polished fruit
for your sunshine to fall on
with Will's Montacute legend in Africa
and Lucy's in England

the living thee living remember
Llewelyn

2 December 1970

“the paradise of our young hearts first extacys
green thickets where the leaves hide him from all
but joys”



The inscription on Llewelyn Powys's tomb stone, carved by Elizabeth Muntz, on the cliff top south of Chydyok, includes the words,

THE LIVING THE LIVING HE SHALL PRAISE THEE

No More

(For Alyse dead—August 27-28 1967)

Now I come again as of old to sit at your knees
 But forgot is the folly of girlhood the roughness and storms
 I only want to say do you remember—
 I want you to take again as then you would
 From me the pain and the anguish
 Of being alive at all—

Our friendship made a concord between passion and reason
 Yet mind and heart often took other council
 Went along ways that could never meet or cross
 But there was an answering wildness of blood
 I shall never know again a kinship
 In most dark melancholy
 An utter blackness in our bright coursing blood
 That mingling in intellectual cold
 Took away sorrow the unconsolable
 Grief of earth-life of
 Woman born to woe and unredeemed
 Froze the despairing emotions
 Wrought despair itself—
 This bitter mingling—
 Into the beauty of Greek sculpture
 Reflective cool unmoving
 Conflict in full light

An uncommitted interplay
 Not daring to stay but convening
 In a swift libation
 Of that sharp wine of the heart
 Finding some succour in our amitie
 (And this must I betray)
 In the brow of the down above
 That high-up attic window
 The red of the black-souled poppies
 The cry of a gull

Do you remember
 Or am I alone in this
 For if you do not there is no meaning
 In those last words you wrote—
 Forgive me and remember me

5-6 September 1967

after the reading of K.P.'s diaries

you are in prison
 the bars are hateful age
 same as the east wind
 this makes man like a wheel
 no more to regard heaven
 the racing clouds
 those tragic grey eyes
 clamped to the ground old friend

'the same the same the same'
 day by day is writ down
 the last penitential years
 yet through that criss-cross of bars
 sun warms fire burns
 comfort for shoulders and shins
 day by day there is 'rest and reading'
 'tea and evening'

never one day you left out the wind
 the quarter and way of it
 now you go free as the unrecorded winds
 with seagull wings

2 October 1971

for Marian

that morning of our moonlit walking
 after the tawny the dappled leopard—
 calling alone the long night—
 over ground bright and yellow
 and sable as the pelt of the hunter
 we stepped softly and calling
 and calling the leopard followed

we came by the river
 singer of clear-flowing phrases
 the living river the path
 flaked with crescents and discs
 of fallen moons and leaves
 where between ebony pillars
 water whiter than moonbeams

than filigree silver cirrose spun
 clouds in azure springs severed
 by iron-toothed scoriac rock
 jets in jabots
 bridal lace the shimmering shroud
 from the tireless dance of the bobbins

for May at Montacute

"as the leaves of a tall poplar tree
 "twirling the thread
 "their fingers move as they sit"
 so now I think of the lacemaker
 with fingers busy dark head devoted
 to the intricacies of delicate threads
 butterflies from her hovering hands
 flowers and timid fawns live
 in the grace of this civilized art
 of sheer adornment and she
 is free again in the garden
 her feet to run
 where all her skill began
 with the twining clematis tendrils
 morning and sunlight of primrose
 keen quiver of leaves in air
 the network designs on the lawn

9 March 1972

Old Man (W. E. P.)

The old man's house stands at the edge of the gorge
 Where boulders with broken fangs buttress the steep.
 In the bottom the river runs loud with rocks
 In a cavernous gloom of glowering trees.
 There is the grove of bananas, a temple
 With smooth columns gold and black that hold aloft
 Fluted vaulted roof of ribbed green leaves, bearing
 Clumsy loads of fruit clusters, here on bare
 Dug ground the old man comes to walk with the sound
 Of waterfall, millwheel and liquid singing
 Of birds. And beyond and beyond the river
 The waterless land and the western rampart
 Of hills. Eastward white plains reach to meet the sun
 Rising over the rim of an empty land.
 Northward the desert, the washing hangs on blue
 Mountains blue isles in a far cloud-shadowed sea.

The room where he sleeps looks west to the evening
 Hills, here the bed of his father and mother,
 Here the pictures of wife dead and son dead, and
 The bundles of letters of brothers dead and
 Sisters dead that he takes from a deep chest
 Deep to hold all the filled full years of his life.

South the mountain, south the sky-bearing pillar,
 Nurse of keen snow unchanging from age to age,
 Heart of the land, heart of his life which his hand
 Has given us in all its sky-born moods
 A thousand times, with cattle with sheep
 With forest, dead tree, gazelle. His homage this
 To life-giving earth he has wielded for God.

Below this poem Mary has entered in
 pencil the following note:

“as I wrote this the emerald-spotted wood
 dove was calling. We are all especially fond of
 this sound which has ‘a dying fall’. Gilfrid
 says he will never willingly live where he
 cannot hear it. Africans think the bird says:
 ‘Father dead, mother dead, wife dead,
 brothers dead, sisters dead . . . children dead
 . . . all dead . . . dead . . . dead . . .
 dead . . .!’” (G.C.)

T. F. P.

In the morning mists a grey figure
hid with stones amid the gravefed grasses
headhigh tassel flowers etched on mist
holding sickle crooked scythe on shoulder
he stood a ghost arisen from those tombs
and grassy fogdraped burials and said:

“you don’t know where to start
'twould be better if there was a path
an’ ’tis so wet too”—
dejected scratched his head
we spoke a little while with graveyard pauses
until he ended cheerily turning from me:
“ah well not to worry”

deep in earth enjoying the sensation
of final obliteration
into clay resurrection
into tassled grasses
the dead man said:
“I rest well as I am Jackie
The Book is well hid by these gentle
grasses”

28 June 1969

Note. T. F. P.’s gravestone is in the form of an open Bible. The “Jackie” referred to is a Mappowder character who used to cut the churchyard grass each year in June and September. He was a favourite of T. F. P.’s who liked to talk a little with him whenever they met. Jackie (Garret) works as a labourer on a nearby farm and is still with us. (G. C.)

T. F. P.

’reddas patefacta necesse est
qualem tibi trado figuram’

“it’s all right for Him
He’s on the other side”

it’s the custom of Powys’s to pause
at the churchyard rails
to consider their unmortality
in the graves of others and their own

“Theodore and I look at our place”

the corner is draughty
the elms stand over unfeeling
with root fibres in obliteration

delay while the ancient eye
on well-trimmed mounds
the underground regenerates

on the rows nearest the corner
flowers flourish then the recession
into neglect no one left who remembers

“that must be Mrs. Garret
is that Mr. Mitchel”

23 March 1974

Prudentius—*the burial of the dead*

‘nunc suscipe terra fovendum . . .
gremioque hunc concipe molli’

Cedric Hentschel

The Improbable Belligerent: the Role of John Cowper Powys in Two World Wars

Despite his Protean nature, rich both in subtleties and inconsistencies, and despite his liking for honest staves and cudgels, John Cowper Powys was scarcely an admirer of the martial arts. Yet his record in two world wars attests that, when faced by foreign aggression, he could lay lustily about him with the weapon of his choice, the pen. His Cowperian addiction to moods of quietude and reverie, though ill-attuned to the spirit of combat, did not emasculate him to the point of pacifism. Fortright in defence of his Ideas, his Sensations, and the common decencies of life, he emerged as Jack on the Warpath—a fitting corrective to “John Wool-Gatherer” and the many other zany self-appellations with which he beguiled his correspondents. He assumed this further role not as a narrow chauvinist, even if at one level he was an avowed regionalist, but rather as the champion of a wide-rooted European culture. While shunning the frenzies of nationalism in their ludicrous and ultimately baleful aspects, he might well have approved *l'Europe des patries*, a concept whereby regional cultural identities are preserved within a loose continental frame.

More fortunate than later generations, the Powys brothers grew to Manhood in a relatively stable world. True, there were constant skirmishes along the frontiers of Empire; but major wars lay in the past and, thanks to the *Pax Britannica*, seemed unlikely to recur. Two years before John Cowper Powys's birth the Franco-Prussian War had briefly convulsed Europe but left Britain unscathed. The first portent of what was to come in our own century was the Boer War; and Powys was already in his early forties when the conflagration of 1914-18 brought with it a sense of close personal

involvement. During the earlier struggle against the Boers he had chanced to encounter Dutch displeasure. Having accepted an invitation to lecture in the Free City of Hamburg, he travelled thither via Rotterdam and Amsterdam. In the *Autobiography* he later commented:

I clearly remember feeling vividly that an Englishman was by no means a *persona grata* in Holland during the Boer War. I doubt very much that if I had even explained . . . that I shared the opinions of my fellow-Welshman, Lloyd George, and was entirely hostile to that imperial trinity, Rhodes, Chamberlain, Kipling, it would have made any difference.¹

In Hamburg itself he was made aware by the cartoons in *Simplizissimus*, “depicting my Sovereign, and that in the last month of her long life, in anything but a dignified



John Cowper Powys above Corwen with his dog, “Very Old”

position," that Germany, too, was staunchly pro-Boer.

Powys was to return to Germany in happier circumstances in 1908 and 1909 when, in both years, he delivered a dozen lectures in Dresden and Leipzig. A magnificent gift of Meissen china from the King of Saxony helped to soothe his earlier ruffled feelings. But Anglo-German rivalry mounted and reached its climax; though when war at last came the outbreak of hostilities at first made little impact on Powys's lecturing routine. He crossed the Atlantic as usual both in 1914 and 1915, and it was thus in America that he turned his thoughts to propaganda. Possibly he might not have hit on serving his country and the Allied cause in this way but for Arnold Shaw's sudden and "momentous" decision to become a publisher—a decision which guaranteed the printing of opinions by no means welcome to all American readers at that time. By the autumn of 1914, therefore, he was ready to launch a counter-attack on an enemy stronghold.

This took the form of *The War and Culture*, with its sub-title *A Reply to Professor Münsterberg*. When, the following year, the work was also issued in England, the publisher, William Rider, apparently felt that the main title lacked punch and changed it to *The Menace of German Culture*. The recent Village Press edition of 1975 retains the less specific but more dignified American version, although the omission of the definite article on the cover and spine hints, perhaps not without justification, at an argument not bound by immediate time and circumstance. This "pamphlet", as Powys modestly calls it, was his first published prose work of any substance, if we except the Syllabuses of 1902. It antedates *Visions and Revisions* and *Wood and Stone*, both published in 1915. Even if *The War and Culture* is restricted to a mere 103 pages, we may still marvel at the rapidity with which it was produced. The book was in the shops in October, barely two months after the outbreak of war, and it thus preceded the anti-Prussian essays of Ford Madox Hueffer.²

An intriguing aspect is the style in which the author presents himself on the title-page. The plain J. C. Powys Esq., B.A., familiar from the lecture-notice, appears armed with a fistful of impressive credentials: JOHN COWPER POWYS, Staff Lecturer for Oxford University Extension Delegacy. Education Department, Free City of Hamburg. Verein für Neuere Philologie, Dresden and Leipzig. University Lecturers' Association New York. Presumably this rigmarole was Arnold Shaw's doing. John was taking on no mean adversary in Professor Münsterberg, and the trick was to make the match seem more even in strictly academic terms than it really was. Jack Powys, fledgling author, was to acquire respectability and to be turned into Jack the giant-killer. More pertinently he was to flaunt recent, personal knowledge of the German arena and thus be seen as someone fit to reply to a Prussian Professor of Psychology who had taught at Harvard since 1892. Hugo Münsterberg had been appointed at the instigation of William James and been placed in charge of the first psychological laboratory in America. His book *The War and America* presented the German case; John's response thus deliberately echoed Münsterberg's title.

Of the four chapters into which *The War and Culture* is divided, the first, "Causes of the War", wobbles over rather thin ice. In the main it offers a critical review of Münsterberg's arguments. The disingenuous don, we are told, seeks to present to the American public the classical but outdated image of the Fatherland as *das Land der Dichter und Denker*—the land of poets and philosophers. John reproves him for omitting all mention of such currently more significant figures as Treitschke and Bernhardi, the respective champions of Prussianism and militarism. These, he stresses, are the men who have inspired the Kaiser's aggressive policies.

Even this first chapter affords insight into characteristic Powysian beliefs. There is, for instance, John's marked anti-racist stance, embracing not only "the attractive negro population in America" but Indians,

Arabs and the Japanese; and there is a typical projection of arguments into the widest possible arena, the enlargement of specific areas of conflict into universal perspectives:

No nation has a right to impose upon another its peculiar and especial political system. No nation has a right to assume that it has the political system which is best for the world at large. For ourselves we hold that the political system of the future is neither that of Germany nor of the United States; nor even that of our own democratic England. Our view is that the political system of the future will be based upon certain vast economic changes . . . When they come it will no longer be a question as to whether the Anglo-Saxon parliamentary polity or the Russian 'religious' polity is to dominate the world. It will indeed be no longer a war between nations. It will be a war between international capital and international labour.³

Here we catch a glimpse of Powys in the unaccustomed role of a political prophet; and his vision of a future swayed by two rival power blocks was not wide of the mark, even if he was not to know, in 1914, that in the fulness of time the capitalist West would become eroded by socialism, while the communist East would have to reach some accommodation with private enterprise, so that the monolithic character of both systems would be tempered by their opposites. Powys's belief in the inevitable pluralism of schemes for governing mankind is however not far removed from the position Aldous Huxley was to adopt, fifteen years later, in *Do What You Will*.

In his second chapter, "A War of Ideas", Powys turns away from his immediate opponent, Münsterberg, to concentrate on more aggressive targets—and in particular on the polemics of General Friedrich von Bernhardi. With apt timing, Bernhardi had, in 1911, published his major work, *Germany and the Next War*, which, by 1913, had already reached a sixth edition. Bernhardi's central thesis is a kind of wrenched Darwinism, which was later to be taken over by the theoreticians of National Socialism and

which also appealed to D. H. Lawrence. War is represented as an indispensable "biological necessity" which, however harsh in aspect, is ultimately benign, since it ensures the survival of the fittest. The more dynamic culture thus overcomes and replaces the less dynamic: hence the rise and fall of empires.

Yet a victory for Prussia, Powys warns, would *not* be a victory for that earlier Germany, the land of poets and philosophers; it would be a military triumph for that industrialized and expansionist Prussia which had emerged after Bismarck's unification of the German Reich. Unlike Münsterberg, therefore, he can see no 'cultural' gain for humanity in German domination over Europe. He assures us with alliterative emphasis that the hallmarks of this resurgent Prussia are "encyclopaedic efficiency and colourless cosmopolitanism." To German idolatry of the State-machine John opposes all those virtues extolled in his own philosophy, setting up the worth of the individual citizen as a counter to the threats posed by centralized bureaucracy and governmental tyranny. It is a view for which he would have found ample warrant in the sayings of his beloved Goethe: "Germany is nothing, but every individual German is much, and yet the Germans imagine the reverse to be true."

In developing his argument Powys seeks common ground with his French and Russian allies. Not least among the ill-effects of German hegemony, he believes, would be the threat to the land of Rabelais and Montaigne:

The triumph of Germany, for instance, over France would mean a disastrous blow to Latin civilization: and, in the present writer's opinion, between German civilization and Latin civilization . . . there can be only one choice—Latin civilization is classical civilization. The greatest writers among the Germans themselves have always recognized this. Goethe and Schopenhauer, Heine and Nietzsche, all looked to France, rather than to the Fatherland, as the spiritual hope of humanity; as the country of true distinction and true culture. To France and to Italy!⁴

Powys here indulges in cultural politics on the grand scale: as always, he is not one to conduct his War of Ideas on a narrow front. At the same time we cannot charge him with undue bias. He does not hesitate to discuss those blemishes which mar the Allied cause. He refers to pogroms and to Russian oppression of the Poles. And addressing himself to the Irish lobby in America, then notoriously sympathetic to the Germans, he does not recoil from mentioning the wrongs inflicted by the English on the Irish.

A significant point emerges. In *The War and Culture*, primarily aimed at the American public, Powys was soliciting the interest of readers in part neutral, indifferent, or even actively hostile. This perhaps explains a tone unusual in the Powys we know from other works. When conducting polemics on one's home ground one can let oneself go. No holds are barred. Exaggeration, as elections show, may be a virtue. In the face of an audience one is trying to win over, to convert, persuasion is called for rather than rhetoric. Certainly Powys presents his arguments with fervour; but he is marginally more dispassionate than is his wont. Knowing that the Irish Americans would not relish an undiluted *English* victory, but knowing also that "if the Celts, whether Irish or otherwise, have any moral and spiritual affinity at all, it is with France," he lays stress, not without guile, on the importance of *Anglo-French* success. It is as if the French component in victory is to atone for the "Philistinism and vulgarity" of the Anglo-Saxon.

John Cowper Powys was utterly opposed to racism in its vile and vindictive aspects; but it is notable that he does not shun terms like 'race' and 'blood' when they suit his theme. He was, after all, writing in that innocent (as it now appears) pre-Hitlerite era, before 'race' had been turned into a taboo for the liberal conscience. He clearly believed in the existence of racial characteristics—part innate, part deriving from environment and tradition—and that these may be classified in accordance with a subjective scale of values. The Celts and the

Slavs, in his estimation, come top of the class. The French share some of the illumination of the Celts. The Teutons (or Germans) hover around the bottom of the scale; and the Anglo-Saxons (the English as opposed to the Welsh) display some of the obnoxious features of the Teutons. *The War and Culture* thus shows how strongly, even at the outset of his writing career, Powys felt drawn towards the Celtic imagination—and also towards Slav mysticism.

In his third chapter, "German Culture vs. Russian Culture", Powys again crosses swords with Münsterberg, who had claimed that "this war is ultimately a war between Germany and Russia, between Teuton and Slav," and that a Russian victory, however unthinkable, would imply the triumph of barbarism over a superior civilization. He suggests that Münsterberg "wilfully confuses" the former confederated Germany of Jena and Weimar, of Dresden and Munich, with the new imperialist Germany of Potsdam and Berlin. If the war is to be viewed as a cultural competition between Germany and Russia, he asserts, why not compare the best writers in the two countries and see who wins? Can Sudermann and Hauptmann be mentioned in the same breath with Tolstoi, Turgeniev, or Dostoevsky? Powys was to pursue this theme on a broader front when, in February-March 1916, he delivered a course of six lectures on "Russian Writers" at the Hudson Theatre in New York, including not only the trio just cited but Chekhov, Gorky, Andreev and Artzibashev.

There are exceptions to the low rating Powys accords to German thinkers, for in this third chapter he repeatedly quotes Nietzsche, as it were refuting Münsterberg out of the mouth of a fellow-German: another astute ploy! Nietzsche's fulminations against his own countrymen and his visions of a European Culture transcending petty nationalism are deftly brought into play. Nevertheless, this recurrent pitting of Nietzsche against Münsterberg had its dangers. As a supreme

master of paradox Nietzsche may dazzle the reader while blurring the issue. It is not for nothing that he was later recruited *in absentia* as an ally by the Nazis. In particular, Nietzsche's virulent anti-Christian bias must have made Powys feel uneasy, for in assessing the great contest between Teuton and Slav he was concerned to stress the deep spirituality of the Russian people, as John Middleton Murry was also to do in his study of Dostoevsky. In this context Powys sought support from another quarter, citing several passages from that neglected writer and near-contemporary, Maurice Baring. Like William Gerhardt, Baring had discovered in the Russian language an indispensable key to understanding the Russian soul. His book, *The Russian People*, had been published in 1911.

In Powys's last chapter, "The War and the World's Future", we step down from that loftier sphere where war is waged in cultural and spiritual terms to re-enter the grim arena of militarism and imperial rivalry. There is a brash incursion into the field of colonial policy, where the author takes to task another pro-German publicist settled in America, a Dr Dernburg, who gives facts and figures to show how disproportionate were the respective empires of Britain, France, and even Belgium on the one hand, as contrasted with Germany's meagre portion on the other. The Germans do, then, have some sort of case; but the trouble is, Powys argues, that a German victory would be a setback to progress in international affairs. His conclusion is:

If Germany wins in this war, the cause of international peace will be put back a hundred years; if she loses, there is every reason to expect that it will receive an immense and irresistible push forward . . . It will be looked upon . . . as an evolutionary flinging of the 'struggle for existence' upon a higher and more productive plane; it will be looked upon as the beginning of a new era—an era where international conflict is decided by international law and the insane waste of human

production caused by race-war is finally reduced to a minimum.⁵

John here shrewdly adapts Bernhardt's neo-Darwinism to suit his own thesis, while also echoing the widely held belief that the conflict of 1914-18 was 'the war to end war'. We now know that such optimism was unjustified; that Germany's defeat bore the seeds of a future holocaust; and that the failure to exercise wise statesmanship in drafting the Treaty of Versailles was, twenty years later, to make the propagandist's task yet more difficult. Indeed, the embarrassments springing from a botched peace may in part explain why Powys's second war book, *Mortal Strife*, shows a markedly different approach, dealing only in the most tenuous fashion with the historical background to the renewed struggle.

Relatively slight though it may be in compass, *The War and Culture* is not a negligible essay. In its day it was a dignified and meaningful contribution to the discussion of war aims. It also occupies a unique place in the Powys canon, not only because of its early date but because in none of his later writings did John come closer to achieving a goal ill-suited to his roving intelligence: the exposition of socio-political ideas based on lucid and closely reasoned argument. And if some of his blithe prophecies were in the event proved false, his margin of error was no wider than that of more seasoned pundits like H. G. Wells.

The War and Culture tells of warfare in its generalized aspect, filtered through an unusual mind and, in the process, robbed of much immediate horror; but members of the Powys family were also personally involved in the hostilities. On the European front Bertie, A. R. Powys, was captured and became a prisoner of war. Brother Will, too, saw active service in East Africa, skirmishing against the legendary forces of Lettow-Vorbeck, while Llewelyn held the fort in his stead on the farm. There were agonizing delays in the exchange of letters between John in America and his brothers

in Kenya. From a letter sent to Lulu in November 1914, a month after *The War and Culture* had been published, we learn that John was now lecturing as well as writing about war aims. He mentions an especially exciting meeting at the Boston Twentieth Century Club where it fell to him and to the French scholar Lichtenberger to defend Nietzsche against the unwarranted attacks of their American adversary, Professor Hudson. In his reply Lulu expressed his delight that John and his French ally had had the best of the encounter. The episode is significant in that it shows how John was not prepared to swim with the tide of indiscriminating anti-German feeling.

From the chapter in the *Autobiography* headed "The War" (it deals with much else as well), we know that John was still at Montacute when war was declared, absorbing the strange rumours that were abroad, "the maddest stories of Russian coins and scraps of clothing left behind in the carriages of our familiar Great Western Railway". More importantly, the war had a dual effect on his own behaviour. He started writing books "at a breakneck pace" and, as "Powys Major's most serious offering on the slaughter-stone" he made a vow to give up "all erotic pleasure—cerebral, voyeurish, or such as burlesque shows excited until the War was over." Despite his relatively advanced age, he developed a sense of guilt over not being at the front. Equanimity was restored by recourse to his well-tryed philosophy. In his self-vindication the authentic voice of John Cowper Powys comes through more strongly than in many pages of *The War and Culture*:

Personal life I held then, and hold now, far more precious than any Cause, or any Faith, or any Country. Personal life and the intensifying and sublizing of personal life is, as far as I am concerned, the only intelligible purpose of the Cosmos . . . But the truth is—and that is the fatal paradox—we mortals are so pathetically heroic that it will have to be made clear to us that it is more heroic to fight against fighting than to fight before we

have the guts to defy these leaders who, after all, are only ourselves turned into prime ministers and dictators.⁶

Given these trenchantly expressed beliefs, it is a further paradox that John twice submitted himself to medical examination as part of the normal recruiting procedure—once in America and again, in 1918, after returning to Britain. On this second occasion he was animated by regional patriotism, for, as he wrote to Llewelyn, he loathed the idea that the Germans, after crossing the Channel, might enter Dorset, "even doing the goosetep perhaps between our Upwey Wishing Well and Maiden Castle". The medical examination in Brighton was less traumatic than he had feared. He was pleased that the doctors handled him "like brittle china", noting their sensitivity as further evidence that the British lack the true military spirit.⁷

Exempted from active service, Powys soon found alternative duties in England, not unlike those he had undertaken in the United States. He became a roving speaker under the auspices of Lloyd George's Bureau of War Aims. Once, in Pembroke, his wonted homage to Celtic culture proved sadly misplaced, for his audience, "extremely Teutonic-looking" descendants of the Flemings, took a dim view both of the Welsh proper and their would-be champion; and perhaps it was as well that his son's suggestion that John Cowper Powys should tour the Western Front as a YMCA entertainer came to nothing. Soon the need to improve his finances drove him back to America, and it was in New York that he heard of the Armistice. Despite the sour after-taste of victory (in his *Autobiography* he censures the antics of vulgar revellers at the Brevoort), he was delighted to be released from his self-imposed erotic taboo and celebrated the peace in his own fashion by visiting burlesque shows and by indulgence in 'wicked' literature.

Like others of his generation, John Cowper Powys must have experienced the conflict of 1939-45 with a sense of *déjà vu*.

But if there were similarities between the two world wars—the main protagonists were at least the same—his own circumstances were now different. As an old man approaching seventy he was no longer in the thick of things, no longer a lecturer making hazardous Atlantic crossings. Holed up in his small corner of Wales for the duration, he had to accept that, outwardly at least, his horizon was growing narrower and that, once again personal relations were likely to be affected by censorship and wartime delays in the mail.⁸ One might indeed suppose that, as a semi-recluse in Corwen, Powys would have been isolated from the effects of total war as they were experienced in major cities, especially as he seldom read the papers or listened to the wireless but relied, instead, on the eyes and ears of Phyllis Playter to filter the news through to him. Yet if we turn to two of the main correspondences of the period—to the letters he wrote to Louis Wilkinson and Nicolas Ross—we see that Powys was affected in many ways, and not merely by the irksome restrictions inseparable from wartime which, *inter alia*, kept him short of tea and bred in Phyllis an acute dislike of margarine. Remote though Corwen was, the war came to his doorstep.

One unlikely visitant was a child evacuee from Birkenhead. Meanwhile Powys's author's copies failed to arrive from the United States, and even poor Lulu's burial had to await less troubled times. Remarkably, the enemy himself was not far distant. Writing to Nicolas Ross in January 1941, Powys records that he constantly hears the 'pant-pant-pant' of Nazi bombers steering towards Liverpool. And he cannot resist transmuting these evils of 20th-century technology into a form more appropriate to his Celtic surroundings: "'Tis like the heavy breathings of 'Cwm Annion' (the dogs of hell)—the hunting hounds of Gwyn ap Nudd, with whom Saint Collen had a contretemps on Glastonbury Tor." Despite these ominous disturbances, Powys clung to his usual balanced response; and when H. G. Wells recommended bombing St Peter's as retribution

for the bombing of St Paul's, he suggested to Ross, in an odd phrase, that such spiteful revenge "is unworthy of a self-educated man".

As to the causes of World War II, the deeds and misdeeds of the belligerents and the ethical principles underlying the struggle, John's stance is noticeably more sceptical than it had been in relation to the earlier conflict of 1914-18. All that earlier suffering and sacrifice had *not* outlawed war for ever, nor made Britain a land fit for heroes. Moreover he could scarcely equate the new Stalinist Russia with the Holy Mother Russia of the past. In his frank correspondence with Louis Wilkinson he at times comes close to declaring 'a plague on *all* your houses!' Why, for instance, had Britain refrained from declaring war on Russia, for absorbing half of Poland, "though it was ostensibly to defend the status quo in Poland that we declared war on Germany"? In company with the tramps and dole-men with whom he discussed such issues he concluded that there was little to choose between Stalin and Hitler, both being more unpleasant than the Chamberlain capitalists: "But *all all* Governments—as the wise Anarchists say—are unpleasant!"⁹

Given this air of clear-sighted reserve, it is perhaps surprising that Powys chose to turn his 'war-thoughts' into a book; but the old often like to retrace earlier patterns and, in adding a sort of companion piece to *The War and Culture*, he may have tried to recapture the excitement of his New York apprenticeship. Perhaps, too, he was swept along in the great publishing surge of the late Thirties and early Forties; for, even more than in 1914-18, World War II unleashed a war of words. Dedicated to Ben and Janie Roberts, *Mortal Strife* is a much longer book than the "pamphlet" in which John had set out his views on the earlier war. It runs to 240 pages and was the fruit of a year's labour. We can, indeed, sympathize with the author's self-commiseration when he was offered only fifty pounds for the manuscript. The genesis of the work is described in several letters to

Ross and Wilkinson. The title was twice changed. The first, *However!*, still remains as the title of the first chapter and must surely also be the first hint of a later, more extensive series of qualifications which became the volume entitled *In Spite Of*. The second title, *Mental Strife*, borrowed from Blake, was retained in the final version except for the change of adjective. When *Mortal Strife* was published in February 1942, only a few days before the English edition of *Owen Glendower*, its appearance prompted Powys to write to Louis Wilkinson:

Isn't it odd that both my 'Owen Glendower' and my 'Mortal Strife' came out within a week or so of each other—the one 950 pages costing 10/6, and the other costing exactly the same, also 10/6 tho' only 500 pages. Is not that odd? I suppose the bigger book's printing cost was saved by being *photographed* . . .¹⁰

Mortal Strife challenges comparison neither with a well-documented view of recent history like Edgar Ansel Mowrer's *Germany puts the Clock Back*, (1933) nor with a more academic study like Rohan D'O Butler's *The Roots of National Socialism* (1941). Furthermore it is not a mere enlarged and updated version of *The War and Culture*, a revision which would have required a more intimate acquaintance with contemporary events on the continent than the author possessed. *Mortal Strife* is a work *sui generis*, the kind of book John Cowper Powys alone could have written: the commentary of an individualist, embodying his personal view of the war. A lavish hotchpotch of the Powysian philosophy, it almost defies analysis and is difficult to contain in any simple definition. Some brave sub-editor at Jonathan Cape was presumably responsible for the description on the dust-jacket:

In this book Mr Powys seeks to define the attitude to the war of 'the common or garden' Britisher. He argues that the root-cause of the war from this point of view was neither industrial nor commercial; but racial,

personal and even metaphysical. He rejects the notion that Hitler was simply the product of the Treaty of Versailles or merely a Figure-head of blind economic forces . . .

He argues that our own war-aims are too organic, too living, too many-sided to admit of any brief logical formulation; and that the ordinary Britisher draws the strength of his resistance to Hitler neither from Religion nor from Philosophy, but from the depths of his own individual soul, whence spring his humour, his eccentricity, his obstinate independence.

This summary, we may feel, is too tautly expressed to have stemmed from his own pen, even if it incorporates many of Powys's favourite words and ideas. For his own authentic assessment we can again turn to the correspondence with Louis Wilkinson:

It is a very *fierce* book: and *in places* amusing: attacking every sort of "Intelligentsia"—attitude to the War; and savagely bursting out at Science, Philosophy and Religion! accusing them *all three* with blasphemous & ribald invective & (you may believe!) reiteration, of failing us at this juncture & letting us down—

Why Religion has failed us

Why Philosophy has failed us

Why Science has failed us

& What has *not* failed us!

—then building up my own best Sensationalism as the only substitute, & the *Best Rest* for intervals, for those who are struggling to destroy Hitler & his Nazis.¹¹

In a later letter Powys does establish a tentative link with "the earlier volume" of 1914.¹² Yet how can we compare the teleologically precise polemics of *The War and Culture* with a work which, for all its profound insights, is frequently opinionated, repetitive, mannered? In *Mortal Strife* Powys at times appears uncertain whether he is writing for the home or the overseas market; whether he is chiefly concerned to strengthen morale on the home front or whether his beguiling portrait of "the common or garden Britisher" is drawn primarily for the admiration of our allies or to win over neutral observers. What is clear is that his

gaze is focused on the mood in Britain rather than on the alarums of war overseas.

There are further important elements which distinguish *Mortal Strife* from *The War and Culture*. In the long years that lay between these two books Powys had become a master craftsman in the art of fiction. It is thus hardly surprising that the plastic and inventive faculty should engagingly intrude into the ratiocinative process. There is even what appears to be a sketch for an unwritten novel which analyses the congenial theme of two contrasted brothers—the one a family man living in town, while the other, living in the country, is childless; but both in their different ways belong to “the school of libertarian individualists.”¹³

Another element, barely perceptible in the “pamphlet” but prominent in *Mortal Strife*, is a preoccupation with morbid psychology. In this twilight area which he had so thoroughly reconnoitered in the novels, John now detected clues to the murky fantasies and savage behaviour of the Nazi oppressors. Torture becomes “the supreme sexual ecstasy of the tyrant”; and he interprets anti-semitism as “a mania with a most interesting erotic shiver in it.”¹⁴ There is little attempt however to dissect the stalwarts of the National Socialist régime in detail. They, indeed, are not much in evidence: they seem to retreat into the background, unable to countenance the withering appraisal of the Common Man, while only Lord Haw-Haw, vociferous even in Corwen, broadcasts his blandishments, to provide Powys with a ready target for his caustic wit.

Finally, as a welcome leaven amid the encircling gloom—for War and Death are not the most agreeable of subjects—the reader is comforted with copious instances of Powysian humour. The analysis of national character, in particular, lends itself well to John’s arch over-simplifications:

It might indeed be said that while the ordinary Frenchman enjoys wine and love and literature and art, the ordinary Englishman enjoys himself. And I think it is for this

very reason that the honour of resisting Hitler to the bitter end has fallen upon us rather than upon France. In the pursuit of religious and aesthetic refinements it is possible to forget the atmospheric disturbance caused by the eruption of Germans in Germany. But when you ‘don’t care for reading’ and ‘don’t know very much about classical music’ and are unable to look forward to a well-cooked meal, you are perforce thrown back upon what is left, namely Nature and your Garden and your Dog.

Our lady-friend may not be available. Our dinner may not be cooked. There may be no wine in the house. But the broad-beans are doing well; and the wind is blowing up for rain; and the fish are biting.¹⁵

It would be wrong to infer the general temper of *Mortal Strife* from this single passage, any more than to assume that his off-the-cuff comments represent Powys’s ultimate assessment of Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans and of the differences between them. We may even feel that the sketches of the national stereotypes—including the low British brow opposed to the finesse and sophistication of the continentals—are in part disingenuous, being deliberately attuned to the needs of those fateful days when Britain was ‘going it alone’. It is difficult to escape some element of distortion in any propaganda exercise. Nevertheless, in his picture of the English life-style he was also parodying a basic simplicity of outlook which had much in common with his own. It is as if, by a strange paradox, John’s personal philosophy can transmute philistinism itself into a cultural asset.

Neither of John’s two ‘war-books’, however dissimilar, deviate from his essential philosophy; but they also hint at an urge to seek, if not the hustings, at least a wider forum than novels and philosophical essays normally aim at. We may infer that, during some periods of John’s long life, there was a tussle between the pull towards seclusion and introspection and the pull towards public affairs. Fortunately, it needed events on the scale of world-wide conflict to distract him from his

more rewarding literary activities. What then emerged were works, minor indeed if weighed against his acknowledged masterpieces, yet still bearing the stamp of his peculiar genius.

In drawing attention to two of the least read books written by John Cowper Powys, I am aware that there is room for much further discussion, and especially for comparing John's stance in both wars with those adopted by his great contemporaries in the world of letters. It must remain something of a puzzle that, however tightly he clung to his idiosyncratic views, this gentle, contemplative philosopher found himself the near-ally of Rupert Brooke,

Ford Madox Hueffer and J. B. Priestley, instead of being enrolled in the pacifist camp along with Romain Rolland, Bertrand Russell and Aldous Huxley. We may well ask: Was John an improbable belligerent or was he not, rather, in Heine's phrase, "a Knight of the Holy Spirit", a lifelong fighter on behalf of the positive values and the many estimable causes he championed? If the enigmas seem to multiply, one conclusion is yet certain. We can hardly call 'escapist', as some have tried to do, a man who twice defended his country with such vigour and so penetrating a grasp of the underlying factors fomenting aggression.

Notes

¹*Autobiography* (1934), 1967, p. 301.

²Hueffer, who only changed his name to Ford Madox Ford after the Armistice, published *When Blood is Their Argument* and the notably pro-French *Between St Dennis and St George* in 1915. There is a certain piquancy in comparing Hueffer with Powys, since Hueffer was partly of German descent—though Powys also is said to have claimed some German blood through the maternal line.

³*The War and Culture*, Village Press, 1975, pp. 9-10.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

⁶*Autobiography*, p. 583.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 586 ff.

⁸E.g., it was not easy to send letters to neutral Sweden, so that the correspondence with his young

Swedish friend and later translator, Sven-Erik Täckmark, begun in 1937, now languished. The letters received by Täckmark, 29 in all, are to be published.

⁹Letter dated 1 Oct. 1939; see *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, 1958, p. 53.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 86; letter dated 12 Dec. 1940.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 88-89; letter dated 12 Jan. 1941. In an ungainly but interesting sentence Powys declares: "I have of course parodied the argument of 'Mortal Strife' here a *little*, so as to entertain you; but I seriously swear to you I do work it out pretty fairly clearly, & what it really is is the Metaphysics of this War—like you used to laugh so at my making *Ideas* fight with teeth & claws in 'The War and Culture'."

¹³*Mortal Strife*, 1942, p. 136 ff. and passim.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 29 and pp. 90-91.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 173.

Ichiro Hara

John Cowper Powys and Zen

Perhaps the following passage in his letter to Henry Miller (undated, though attributed by Ron Hall, the editor of *John Cowper Powys's Letters to Henry Miller*, to 1950), is the first reference to Zen in John Cowper Powys's published writings:

Yes I know *a little* about Zen. It comes in a Book about Tea by some Chinaman. It's *a bit* Taoistic isn't it? with a *touch* of a rather heavier thing from Buddhism?¹

From the context of this passage, we can surmise that in the letter to which Powys is replying, Henry Miller who was, as is well known, a devoted admirer of Zen, must have spoken enthusiastically to Powys of its wisdom. By "Yes I know *a little* about Zen", Powys meant to let Miller know that he was not ignorant of the subject. His reference to "some Chinaman" as the author of "a Book about Tea" was mistaken since *The Book of Tea*, published by Fox Daffield in 1906, was written by a Japanese, Tensin Okakura Kakuzo (1862-1913) who was a profound thinker, leader of modern Japanese pictorial art and, for some time, the Chief of the Eastern Department of the Boston Art Museum. The book was written in English for the purpose of informing Westerners of the Tea Ceremony and the Tea Cult, which originated in Japan more than 500 years ago though the cultural spirit of it was deeply influenced by Taoism and Zen. Chapter III is entitled "Taoism and Zen", and must have been the very source of Powys's "little" knowledge of Zen.

But though his knowledge of it was "a little", indeed, his intuitive recognition of the essence of Zen, as shown in his words, "It's *a bit* Taoistic isn't it? with a *touch* of a

rather heavier thing from Buddhism", is admirably correct.

We know from Powys's letter of August 21st 1950 to Miller that Miller had again written to Powys on July 29th, but it is in his letter dated "Xmas Day 1951" that we find Powys's greatest admiration for Zen expressed together with his ardent eulogy of Miller as "the only *living* master (of Zen) Phyllis and John know". Though it is very long, I will quote the whole passage:

O how your old John and his Phyllis do agree with the sentence you go on to quote from the Zen. You know Henry I am still quite ignorant of the Zen for I gave away a book about it—before I had read it to a friend who was shut up pro-tem in an *Asylum* and he came out cured and has a job now but I'm not asking for it back as I hope he left it behind in that place's *library*. But Phyllis gave me the 2 vols translation of the Texts of the Tao in Max Müller's Oxford Press Sacred Books of the East Edition and the peculiarly apt and humorous sayings of Kwang Tse have served us so far in the same way, I fancy, as the Zen would and could . . . But you know how it is when you have been taught that there is nothing, in one master's tone, and with one master's accompanying gesture and this great gospel of 'getting rid of' even unto the 'etcetera' as the only *living* master Phyllis and John know, namely *H.M.* says, has so saved and liberated us thro' the quaint anecdotes of Kwang Tse that we are already so un-Moses'd—un-Nietzsche'd—un-Mahomed—un-Buddha'd—un-Jesus'd—un-God'd & un-Deviled that we just say amen—I wanted to show you the Welsh for amen but I've forgotten—at your Zen 'get rid of opinions, beliefs, dogmas', etc, etc, etc."²

This seems to show us that Powys as well as Miller found Zen's essential wisdom ("this great gospel") in "getting rid of

opinions, beliefs, dogmas, etc, etc, etc” and I think these words correspond with the famous logoi of Zen: “There is another wisdom (of Buddha) besides his teachings written in the Scriptures.”

Powys’s reference to “this great gospel” and to Henry Miller as “the only living master Phyllis and John know” shows how great an impression Miller’s Zen quotations made upon him, and the first mention of Zen in his philosophical writings appears in *In Spite Of* which was published in 1953, about two years after the letter quoted above:

At the risk of completely antagonizing our poor hesitating convertite and sending him packing to become an existentialist or at least a neophyte in the mysteries of Zen, allow us, O indulgent reader, to return to brass tacks.³

It is significant and interesting that Zen should here be mentioned along with Existentialism, because there is much evidence that Powys had been intensely interested in Sartre and his philosophy since 1947.⁴ And in a letter to Louis Wilkinson dated January 21st 1956, which is about four years after he expressed his keen interest in Zen in the letter of Christmas Day 1951, we find such words as “It’s old age—that’s what it is! When I’m 90 I’ll be off on Tao or the Zen!”⁵

At first I could not understand what “be off on” meant, but Mr. Bissell, the well-known collector of Powys books, and Professor Blackmore of Colgate University have kindly told me that “be off on” means “write on”, “start on” or “be involved with”. I don’t know whether, by “When I’m 90 I’ll be off on Tao or the Zen” Powys meant “When I’m 90 I’ll have sufficient knowledge of Tao or the Zen to write on them” or “I’ll be wise enough to write on them”, but I think it is evident from these words that Powys thought Tao and the Zen to possess the ripest wisdom which old age alone can give us.

In another of his letters to Miller, Powys offers to him his highest eulogy:

O but my dear Henry, I’m forgetting what Phyllis said! *She said* that to know you towards the close of my life was the greatest thing that had happened to her and me since we started living together over 25 years ago in Patchin Place, off 6th Ave and Jefferson Market (in New York).⁶

And I think that among the blessings given by Miller to Powys “towards the close of (his) life” must be included the stimulus provided by Miller to his interest in Zen.

It is, incidentally, usually assumed by Powys scholars that the book of Zen given by Miller to Powys was *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics* by R. H. Blyth. Blyth lectured in English literature for a long time in Japanese Universities and at the same time made deep studies into Zen and Japanese poetry such as *Haiku* and *Senryu*. I am not sparing in my recognition of Blyth’s distinguished services in making Zen and Haiku known among Western intellectuals interested in Japanese and Eastern cultures. However, I cannot but find some serious mistakes in his view of Zen and Haiku; these are also illustrated in a letter from Powys to me, dated January 1st 1958, in which he shows a fierce reaction against Blyth’s opinion that we can find the Spirit of Zen in the poems of many representative English poets. Blyth wrote in his preface to *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*,

In English Literature we find expression of the Zen attitude towards life most consistently and purely in Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickens and Stevenson. Arnold says, ‘The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry,’ and this is true of any religion at any time in the history of the world.⁷

Against this view, Powys wrote,

I have recently been given by my old friend Mr. Max Lincoln Schuster of ‘Simon and Schuster’ Publishers New York City, a volume by a Mr. Blyth of Japan about Zen. But I cannot understand it. It does not appeal to me. I don’t respond to it at all—whereas I have always responded to the Chinese Tao—and Laotze and Kwantze—

Kwangtze *especially*. But when this man Blyth takes me through our own Western poetry and keeps pointing to all our greatest poets (such as I know by heart) one after another and keeps saying: 'There's Zen! There's Zen! There's another piece of pure Zen!' I simply can't understand what the devil he's talking about!

And in the next letter to me, dated 25th July 1958, Powys again accused Blyth,

No, it's funny but I can't, as we say at school here, 'cotton on to' Zen or to Mr. Blyth . . . It is because Zen is too Christian!

As to this difference between Powys and Blyth, I must confess that I am of the same mind, not as Blyth who was a great expert on Zen, but Powys who said, "I am still quite ignorant of Zen." I agree with Powys because Blyth's Zen is "too Christian". Zen is, as Powys intuited with the insight of genius, a unique Eastern attitude to life, quite different from that of Christianity.

Such being the case, I think the book on Zen Powys received from Miller must have been a different one, say some of Alan Watt's Zen books or other works of Blyth, such as *Zen and Zen Classics*.

II

The influence upon Powys of Miller's enthusiasm for Zen seems to have been fairly great since we frequently find such Zen-like words and ideas as "Nothingness", "the Void", "Emptiness", "Darkness", etc., not only in his last philosophical book *In Spite Of* (1953), but in those fantasy novels, *All or Nothing*, *Up and Out*, *The Mountains of the Moon*, *Two and Two*, *You and Me*, and *Real Wraiths* which were the last published in his lifetime or posthumously.

However, we must not ascribe the Zen-like elements in Powys's thought entirely to the influence of Henry Miller since 1951, because we find such elements some time before that. For instance, in the last chapter of *Obstinate Cymric* ("My Philo-

sophy Up-to-Date as influenced by Living in Wales", which was written in 1947 "hurriedly quickly and so to say *at one break* (as) a complete new and fresh essay,"⁸ we already find profoundly Zen-like passages on pages 99-100, 165-6, and 177-178. Here is one of them:

Solely by reason of the fact that at the back of our mind there is a dark void of absolute nothingness from which it seems to us that we draw the strength and power of our individual souls. From the beginning, God and the Devil, our 'Conscience' and our 'Unconscious', have attacked us from the rear. They have taken advantage of the fact that our minds *function outwards into Nature*; and where there is absolutely nothing at all but a blank, dark, empty void, there they have stuck like terrible leeches, being nothing, come from nothing, leading nowhere, unreal! unreal! unreal! like the imaginary hairs on the stump of an imaginary tail that needs an imaginary operation.⁹

This is nothing less than Zen. It is Zen itself, and we find the same Zen-like thought on pages 99-100.

In any ordinary process of what I might call *growing conscious of consciousness* the individual identity which is our Psyche or inmost self seems to us to be using the dead blackness and absolute negation, upon which the inner window of its consciousness opens, as we might use a battery or dynamo of inexhaustible and unfathomable power. And what if the new revelation were simply that the magnetic current thus available for our individual purpose is our deepest self, a 'not-ourselves' that is part of ourselves?¹⁰

This notion is developed into the thought emphasized in *Mortal Strife* that the deeper part of our soul is "another Dimension"—*Mortal Strife* was written in Wales during the war.

However, we should not overlook the fact that even before he settled in Wales, Powys had already shown signs of Zen-like thoughts and attitudes. In *Autobiography* we read:

I have acquired some mystical, perhaps even Tibetan trick, of sinking back upon the Cosmos or upon the Mystery of the Tao behind the Cosmos, which I can always make use of at a pinch,¹¹

and

At such times [that is when he came to a lecture hall absolutely exhausted] I used to squat down on anything that was available behind the stage and proceed with deliberate Tibetan craft to make my mind a blank. This I generally had no difficulty in doing, and with my mind in this condition I could sink and sink into I know not what fathomless depths of sub-Being.¹²

Squatting down quietly to make our mind a blank and trying to sink into fathomless depths of sub-Being, this is what is called 'Za-Zen' (sitting-Zen) in Japanese. But how did Powys acquire his knowledge of 'Za-Zen'? Well, we must take note of the word 'Tibetan' used in both passages in *Autobiography* quoted above.

Now, although the so-called Zen is a school of Buddhism which was brought from India to China by an Indian monk called Bodhidharma at the beginning of the 6th Century, much influenced by Taoism there, and then brought to Japan, the original Sanskrit word for the Japanese 'Zen' was 'dhyana', meaning 'to quiet the mind', and one of the most important elements of all Buddhist schools including Tibetan Buddhism.

We know from the *Autobiography* that it was through reading Colonel Sinnet's *Esoteric Buddhism* while he was lecturing in girls' schools in West Brighton that Powys first came to know Buddhism. I am entirely ignorant of what kind of Buddhism was expounded in this book, which must have been the first source of Powys's knowledge of Buddhism, but from the word 'Esoteric' in the title and his frequent reference to Tibet in the *Autobiography*, I suppose it was probably the Esoteric Tibetan Buddhism called Lamaism.

Now, let us consider Powys's general attitude to Buddhism. In great contrast to

his whole-hearted devotion to the Taoism of Lao-tze and Kwang-tze—he called himself a Taoist—and in spite of his great respect for Buddha,¹³ he was highly critical of, and unsympathetic to, Buddhism. Why was this? I think it was his temperamental passion for Homer's Hellenistic "zest for life".¹⁴ We read in the *Autobiography*,

A Taoist is what I really am; but a Taoist uninfluenced by that later Buddhistic Element, that indifference to pleasure and pain, which is such an un-Homeric treachery to our life's Trojan War.¹⁵

But in spite of such temperamental uncongeniality to Buddhism, Powys seems to have gradually developed a sympathetic inclination towards it, especially to Zen-Buddhism, though he was entirely unaware of it. Let me try to trace this change in the history of Powys's thought.

In the *Autobiography*, we read that while Powys was a schoolboy at Sherborne, he experienced "an indescribable Nirvana" or "a perfect ecstasy of delight" during one of his stays at Penn House, Weymouth, where his aged grandmother lived.

Out of the drawing-room window I then used, in stealthy quietness—for Penn House was the house of an invalid—to gaze at the dancing, glittering, dazzling sun-path on the waters of the bay. Sun upon water, element upon element, and both of them in radiant spasms of white glory—such phenomena simply rapt me away in those days, in an indescribable Nirvana.¹⁶

However, I must say that what is here called "Nirvana" is quite different from the experience described by that word in Buddhism. The Buddhist Nirvana as first attained by Buddha, quietly sitting under 'the Bo-tree', the tree of Enlightenment, seeing the twinkling morning star, would seem to be an experience quite different from Powys's. The Buddhist Nirvana, though I have not yet myself experienced it, is thought to be an experience full of delight but to be a more calm and profound experience than the Powysian "thrilling" one.

It is, as is shown by its etymological meaning (that is *nis* 'out' + *va* 'to blow') 'the extinction of all desires and passions and the attainment of perfect beatitude', a more negative, though innerly very positive, experience, and rather I think resembling the *ataraxia* of Epicurus, which Powys disliked in the days when he wrote *The Meaning of Culture*, though he came to feel more sympathetic to it around the time that he wrote *The Art of Happiness* (1935) and *Mortal Strife* (1942). In *The Meaning of Culture* (1929) we read:

There have been great metaphysical and religious systems teaching that a certain calm indifference, a certain imperturbableness, what the Greeks call *ataraxia*, is the true end—to be unmoved, in fact, by both misery and pleasure. This resigned indifference does not seem to the present writer to satisfy the natural demands of living, sentient beings as fully or as freely as the old simple Homeric zest for life.¹⁷

This passion of Powys's for a Homeric and Hellenistic "zest for life" was not only the cause of his uncongeniality to Buddhism but also of his misinterpretation of the meaning of Nirvana.

As I said earlier, sitting quietly is one of the most important elements in Zen and Powys practised the "Tibetan craft" of sitting quietly "to make (his) mind a blank". But though he practised it, he was never aware of the great Zen significance of the practice. On the contrary, he even despised sitting and, following Nietzsche, praised the significance of walking. In *A Philosophy of Solitude* (1933), Powys writes,

Nietzsche maintained the admirable opinion that all exciting and enlarging human thoughts come to their originators' heads in the process of walking . . . With a priest's instinct, with an artist's instinct, with a mystic's instinct, Nietzsche condemns the sedentary position as an accompaniment of thrilling inspiring thought . . . When you think in a seated posture you think with your rump, not with your soul.¹⁸

In this rejection of sitting quietly it must be said that Powys was most anti-Zen.

But, even in *A Philosophy of Solitude* itself, Powys had praised Wordsworth's poem "Personal Talk" in which sitting silently alone is praised, and it seems that from about the time that he wrote *Mortal Strife* he realised the great significance of sitting quietly. In it he writes:

I doubt if any Frenchman can understand our Wordsworthian passion for sitting alone over our fire waiting for the kettle to boil.

And in *The Art of Growing Old*, which was published in 1944 following *Mortal Strife*, we find Powys's highest praise of sitting quietly:

Who has not wondered in awe and pity at the power old people have of sitting for hours—God! and here lie secrets that have been lost to us since our perambulator days!—without reading or writing, *knitting* perhaps if they're women, because knitting leaves attention free, but in any case breathing in and swallowing down and drinking up, absorbing through every pore of their old withered skins—Oh Prince, what shameless joy! Oh Prince, what scandalous pleasure!—the *story* of the life around them.²⁰

Here we feel Powys approached very close to Zen without knowing Zen.

In the very first chapter of *The Art of Growing Old* entitled "Old Age in Man and Woman", we find passages which are nothing less than considerations of 'Za-Zen' (sitting-Zen) and of 'mu-shin' (no-mind) which is the most valued mental state of Zen, though Powys knows nothing of Zen!

All this will clearly explain why Powys understood and sympathised with Zen at once when Henry Miller told him about it in 1950. His mind and thought were then almost sufficiently prepared for it.

We have seen that the first use of the word 'Zen' in Powys's published philosophical writings occurs in *In Spite Of*, published in 1953. But the presence of Zen is found not only in the use of the word;

we find in this book that many of Powys's thoughts have changed in the direction of Zen. For example, there is the passage in pages 238-9:

Well, let us go a step or two further and imagine ourselves—in whatever kind of house you like—confronted by the familiar walls and their shelves and ornaments and pictures, or with nothing but a dirty wallpaper, which itself, by reason of age and damp, is peeling off in melancholy-looking strips.²¹

This reminds me of the story that Bodhidharma, the founder of the Zen sect in China, attained Enlightenment by practising 'Za-Zen' facing a wall for nine years. And the following quotation reminds me of the Buddhist idea of 'mu-ga' (no-ego)

It is indeed a perfect example of how egoism, or 'selfishness' if you like, when carried to its extreme point and to its uttermost excess, ceases to be itself, and loses itself in something else! What it loses itself in, in this case, is pure sensation, the most lovely, beautiful, divine, heavenly thing you can possibly be lost in! Not only has all pride, vanity and conceit in yourself gone, but *you* have gone—yes, *you*, Charles or Walter, or Wolfgang, or Etienne, or Livio, or Susan, or Celia, or Rosamund, or Mary, have completely melted away! What is left then? Nothing is left but an impersonal vibration of sensation enjoyed to the limit of enjoyment by a pair of impersonal complementaries who used to be called mind and matter, self and not self, or even subject and object.²²

This state of "pure sensation" where "*You* have gone" and "nothing is left but an impersonal vibration of sensation enjoyed by a pair of self and not-self" is nothing less than 'mu-shin' (no-mind) and 'mu-ga' (no-self) in Zen. Here we no longer find the conscious confrontation of Self and Not-Self which was emphasized in Powys's earlier thoughts. What a change!

I think, by the way, that it is necessary to add here that in spite of his awakening to the significance of 'sitting quietly', the later Powys did not cease to assert the great sig-

nificance of 'walking' emphasized in *A Philosophy of Solitude*. But in Zen Buddhism, too, the value of spiritual training of 'angya' (itinerary walking) is fully recognised.

Powys's emphasis on "another Dimension" and his view that "the interior depths of the soul are already in the next Dimension", both expressed in *Mortal Strife* which was written during the war, are further indications of the tendency of his thought towards Zen. In a letter to Wilkinson, he called the philosophical position of this book "Neo-Kantianism", which, according to Powys, means "another Dimension" or "the next Dimension". This, he says, is the world of what Kant called "Thing in Itself" which is beyond the categories of Time and Space, and Powys asserted in this book that a portion of our soul is *already* in the next Dimension. He wrote:

When a man is at bay there is nothing left but his soul. And his soul is enough. His soul contains everything. His soul is limited outwardly by the Dimension of its life, of its struggle to continue its life. But inwardly it is in touch with another Dimension.²⁴

Although a portion of the soul of every gudgeon and moth and lizard and newt and beetle and bird, not to speak of man and the nobler animals, is already in the next world—which is only the next Dimension of the unfathomable multiverse—its nature and character are so completely hid from us that all we have a right to say about it is that it is a different from any of our Space-time conceptions of it as a human thought is different from a frost-mark on a window pane.²⁵

And Powys said that, by lowering a bucket into a deep bottomless well in our souls, which is what Keats called "the resources of his spirit", we can bring it up full of living water.

Now, what Powys called "the soul" corresponds with what is called 'Buddha-nature' in Zen, and Zen teaches us that we must find the forces of our salvation in our awakening to the 'Buddha-nature' within

ourselves. Thus, in his notion of “the soul” within us as possessing the means of salvation—though Zen calls it ‘satori’ (enlightenment), not ‘salvation’—we can say Powys came, essentially, to the same conclusion as Zen.

But the most questionable issue in *Mortal Strife* is that Powys sometimes confuses, or tends to confuse, “another Dimension” with the survival of souls after death, though, when he says “a portion of our soul is already in the next Dimension”, we must understand that he refers to a deeper dimension of consciousness rather than life after death.

However, it is a great regret to me that he should often, in *Mortal Strife*, have confused these two ideas and that he should have attacked Charles Lamb and his own brother Llewelyn who denied life after death. But in *In Spite Of* which is his last philosophical book, written after the wisdom of Zen had been revealed to him by Henry Miller, Powys resolutely denied life after death. He wrote:

Our ‘Philosophy of In Spite’ must be perpetually reminding its votaries that, whatever happens to us, there is not one of us who can possibly live very long after his eightieth birthday, and when we are dead, dead indeed we are, dead, gone, lost, vanished, out of it for good and all, obliterated forever, as completely erased from the scroll of being as if we had never been.²⁶

I began a correspondence with Powys in February of 1953, and when *In Spite Of* was published that year, he presented a copy to me, writing in the letter dated July 18th 1953, “I am sending you as a respectful gift my latest Book of a semi-philosophical kind entitled ‘In Spite Of—a Philosophy for everyman.’ And I think you will see from it that my own ideas have changed—I hope for the better and truer!—but I can only hope that.” And in a letter dated July 1st 1958, he told me, “. . . my feelings now turned against religion and towards entire and utter annihilation which was what my brother Llewelyn always believed in!” Again, in the letter of August 22nd of the

same year, he wrote “Yes, he [Redwood Anderson] is no doubt as *most* of my friends are—in fact I might say *all*—an agnostic about whether we shall have a future life or not. But I grow steadily more and more dogmatic in favour of annihilation.”

In the *Autobiography* we read:

There is a vein of ferocious realism in me; into which, across the neutral No Man’s Land of my suspended judgement, my soul at certain moments sinks headlong. And in this realistic mood of mine I am always grimly and starkly aware of the possibility that there is no such thing at all as this ‘rising to immortality and intense happiness’ about which, following the cosmic interest of Goethe, the Christian instinct of Dostoevsky, and *most of all* the secret tradition of the ancient Mysteries, I am forever muttering and gesticulating.²⁷

Thus, after the long, long period from his boyhood to his seventies, of his inveterate agnosticism about annihilation after death, we see that Powys’s “realism” has triumphed at last and that his tendency to identify “another Dimension” with life after death was a confusion after all. What he called “another Dimension” is the deeper part of our souls, called ‘Buddha-nature’ in Zen.

Now, I mentioned earlier that in the chapter entitled “My Philosophy Up to Date as influenced by Living in Wales” in *Obstinate Cymric* (1947), Powys begins to use such remarkably Zen-like phrases as “the Void”, “Nothingness”, etc. But I remember now that in *The Art of Growing Old* (1944) he already refers to such Zen-like matter as “that vast interior Darkness, that mysterious and immaterial Void”, and I am reminded that the trend of his thought was already in this direction before his correspondence with Miller on Zen. Apart from that, however, the tendency to Zen thought in “My Philosophy . . .” is remarkable. I will quote two passages from the Essay:

In any ordinary process of what I might call *growing conscious of consciousness* the individual identity which is our Psyche or

inmost self seems to us to be using the dead blackness of absolute negation, upon which the inner window of its consciousness opens, as you might use a battery or dynamo of inexhaustible and unfathomable power. And what if the new revelation were simply that the magnetic current thus available for our individual purpose is our own deeper self, a 'not ourselves' that is part of ourselves.²⁹

Solely by reason of the fact that at the back of our mind there is a dark void of absolute nothingness from which it seems to us that we draw the strength and power of our individual souls.³⁰

"The dead blackness and absolute negation" and "a dark void of absolute nothingness" mentioned in these passages are the images that are most important and frequently used images in Zen.

Now we know that, except in the case of such mystical thinkers as Meister Eckhart and St John of the Cross, negative ideas like 'nothingness' and 'darkness' are disliked and shunned in Western Thought where the idea of "Being" is most highly valued since the days of, say, Parmenides who regarded 'eon' (Being) as the fundamental principle of the universe and of the Old Testament which calls God 'I am that I am'. Powys himself originally deprecated the ideas of 'nothingness' and 'void'. In his narrative poem "Lucifer" written in 1905, he expressed his antipathy to Buddha by calling him 'Prophet of Nothingness' and 'Wizard of the Void'.³¹ Yet we have seen how, in his old age, Powys came to call the fundamental reality by such negative words as "nothingness", "void", and "darkness".

But it is important to recognise that what Powys in his old age called 'Nothingness' is entirely different from the idea of 'nothingness' in common usage, which is merely the antithesis of 'being'. The "Nothingness" of old Powys, as well as of Mahayana Buddhism, is the negative expression of 'Being' itself, and by being 'negative', the expression involves a profound mystic significance. Already in *Mortal Strife*, Powys wrote,

Now what our rationalists are simple-minded enough to imagine as 'nothing' is a very

different thing from the real and absolute nothing. The real and absolute nothing might be anything; that is the point!³²

As I have said, there is much evidence of essentially Zen trends of thought to be found in Powys's last philosophical book, *In Spite Of*. But I think it remarkable that these Zen tendencies of old Powys were further deepened and amply shown in the short stories which the critics called 'fantasies' and which were written in the last years when Powys was bedridden, some of them published while he was alive, others posthumously.

For example, we read in *Up and Out*:

Certainly, when Kwangtze was gone, either independently of the Tao he had been teaching us or under its patient influence, Nothingness spread her indescribable wings and floated over our heads like a vast moth;³³

and in *All or Nothing*,

We are in this something, and so are more worlds and suns and moons and stars than we can count. But this something is thin air. This something is nothing. But it isn't nothing in the sense of not being there at all, for it is everywhere. That is its peculiarity.³⁴

In *Two and Two, Real Wraiths and You and Me*, which were published many years after Powys died, we find frequent and strong emphasis on "Nothingness". In *Two and Two*, we find such passages as, "the wild delight of their sense of Nothingness grew and grew upon them."³⁵ AND

Endless nothing is the reality of life; . . . the Meaning of Life must either exist in this Nothingness itself or if not so there must still be awaiting discovery . . . some innermost intimate secret for the sake of which, in the service of which, to the purpose of which, and for the uttermost fulfilment of which, all this infinite mass of Nothingness alone exists.³⁶

Another 'fantasy' tale, *You and Me*, which seems to have been begun in January 1959 and was completed in July of that year, shows the progress and deepening of Powys's Zen thought. In this tale he uses

the word "Emptiness" along with "Nothingness" for the first time, and 'Sunyata' in Sanskrit or 'Ku' in Japanese, which means 'Emptiness', is a symbolic word denoting the Ultimate, not only in Zen, but in Mahayana Buddhism in general. The following is an instance of the use of the word "Emptiness" in *You and Me*:

It was in that vast Emptiness that existed before our Universe came into existence. The ghost of Shakespeare stood very still and stared at me very gravely. 'We are really, then' he said 'such stuff as dreams are made of.'³⁷

And later we meet, "the blessed Emptiness", "the aboriginal Emptiness" and "the Ultimate Emptiness."³⁸

Now, in my letter to Powys written in August 1959, entirely unaware of *You and Me* being in progress at that time, I told him that, whilst his Elementism is confined to the four Elements according to the old Greek tradition, Buddhism expounds the five Elements, another one being that of 'Sunyata' (Emptiness). Powys promptly responded in his letter of August 27th:

All you say about the Four Elements Earth Water Fire and Wind and about the Fifth Element Sunyata is of special interest to me. O my dear old friend, and how I do agree with you that this Fifth Element Sunyata has more in it than be quite satisfied by the word Vacancy.

I think these words show that what Powys had in mind when he used the word "Emptiness" in *You and Me* was of the same symbolic significance as 'Sunyata' in Buddhism.

Thus, surveying the 'fantasy' tales written in his last years, we find that Powys's frequent use of an emphasis on those typically Zen words "Nothingness", "Void", "Darkness", and "Emptiness", show the deepening of his sympathy with, though not his studies of Zen and this clarifies his meaning when he wrote to

Louis Wilkinson, "It's old age—that's what it is! When I'm 90 I'll be off on Tao or the Zen!"

An old English Powysian has advised me not to treat these 'fantasy' tales too seriously, because they are, after all, "the trivial out-pourings of a man in his dotage!"³⁹ I thank him for his advice, but cannot entirely agree with his prudence. The Powys who wrote these 'fantasies' certainly was in his dotage and quite different from the Powys who wrote those colossal masterpieces, *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Porius*, etc., and it is evident that he was clearly aware of his "dotage". However, Powys strongly cherished the notion of old age as a "second childhood" and believed it to be "that Childhood of our Race, that Golden Age 'before the fall', when the truth was felt, as it has never been felt since, that the life of Nature is pluralistic."⁴⁰

In this respect, Powys's attitude to old age very much resembles that of the ancient Chinese, to whom 'old' was the highest honorific for wise men. 'Laotze', the name given to a certain philosopher of ancient China who was called Li-Tan, originally meant 'an old man'. So, in old Chinese literature, we sometimes find Shakya (Buddha) is also called 'Laotze'.

In the *Autobiography*, Powys is so sympathetic to Taoism that he calls himself a Taoist, but he is very sceptical towards Buddhism, and in some respect even antipathetic to it. But, as my survey has shown, it seems that, in the last stage of his long life, his thought became, in some respects more Buddhistic than Taoistic, emphasising the mystical significance of "Nothingness" and "Emptiness".

In *In Spite Of* Powys tells us "to drain up all our emotional tremors": we must "fling ourselves into Nature as if Nature were a fathomless ocean into which we could dive,"⁴¹ and he called this "jumping" into Nature or the Universe "Cosmogonizing."⁴² This jumping into the cosmos is the most crucial action in Zen Buddhism, too, and it teaches us to make the final leap

at the time of death. Master Dogen (1200-1253), the founder of the Soto-Zen sect in Japan, composed the following poem on the eve of his death:

For fifty-four years I've enlightened the
Empyrean Heaven.
Now I jump into, dive into,
Touch and break, the great Multiverse.
Ah! My whole body, seeking nothing,
Falls into Hades, alive.

What Dogen called "Hades" in this poem is Merlin's "Esplumeoir" and that profound "Dimension of Silence" which Powys magnificently describes in the last paragraphs of Chapter V of *Mortal Strife*.

III

Thus far, I have concentrated on the Zen-like side of Powys's thought. But although in his old age he showed a remarkable leaning towards Zen, he remained, at the same time, a staunch humanist to the end of his life. He was an ardent admirer of Homer to the last and at the end of that important essay "The Aether Speaks" at the opening of *Homer and the Aether* (1959) which, I think, may be regarded as Powys's last sermon given to all Powysians, he stated,

Every man, woman and child living upon earth has to struggle to be happy, fight to be happy, weep, howl, shout, yell to be happy, walk, crawl, run, dance, climb, hide, dig caves, carve boats, build houses, cultivate gardens, in order to be happy, in order to last out to the End. O, and how lucky you terrestrial creatures are that when the End comes you can lie down and go to sleep and never wake up again!⁴³

Thus we see that Powys's philosophy of life is a highly complex one, revealed in his complex vision and being on one side sympathetic to Tao and then Zen and on the other side to a Homeric Humanism. We might call it "Cosmic Humanism" since it harmonized Homeric Humanism with

mystic cosmic philosophy involving his subtle elemental sensationism and "cosmogonizing."

This complex philosophy of Cosmic Humanism is most happily illustrated in *Real Wraiths*, another 'fantasy' tale written in Powys's dotage and one with a two-fold lesson. Its cosmic aspect is seen in the goddess Hecate's terrible order for Hades to plunge into the whole great mass of universal matter and become the soul of it all, while the Humanist side is shown in the hearty desire of the four "real wraiths" (who are, I think, not really ghosts, but symbolized souls of living men and women) to go to Switzerland which is the freest country in the world and make the chapel of William Tell, the champion of freedom, their home. Then one of the wraiths informs Hades, who has now become the *Soul of Matter*, of their whereabouts at the home of William Tell, so that they may communicate with him and he with them at any time. Listening to the desire of the wraith, Hecate tenderly cries,

Well said, my sweet little girl! Yes, that is where we will take up our abode from henceforth and forever! Or at least as long as you four human ghosts keep in touch with our King Hades, as I myself always shall!⁴⁴

In the intimate touch and the free communication between the "Soul of Matter" and "Champions of freedom"—here is found the secret of John Cowper Powys's Cosmic Humanism.

And, after all, Powys is Powys. Though he came deeply to sympathize with Zen in his old age he lived by his own philosophy. Such was the case with his attitude to Existentialism. He highly valued Sartre's philosophy, and read with much interest his novels and dramas, admiring one of his novels as "a lovely soft rotten Peach! whose juice keeps running down your chin, as if down Aaron's beard!"⁴⁵ However, he was firmly convinced that his own philosophy of "In Spite Of" is a living rival of Existentialism.⁴⁶ I think the following words from *In Spite Of* are a clear expression of his attitude to Zen and Existentialism.

At the risk of completely antagonizing our poor hesitating convertite and sending him packing to become an existentialist or at least a neophyte in the mysteries of Zen, allow us, O indulgent reader, to return to brass tacks. Here am I or you, here is he or she, tired after a day's work in field or factory, in shop or office, in street or house, on deck or on the dock, at work or at play, imploring fate to

bestow a 'break' of *some* sort, a bit of a taste of the kind of life wanted so bitterly. Listen, therefore, to the oracle of 'In Spite', or, to use the actual words of the Homeric muse, of *alla kai empes*.⁴⁷

It is deeply regrettable that John Cowper Powys came to know Zen too late.

Notes

¹*Letters to Henry Miller*, ed. Ronald Hall, 1975, p. 35.

²*Ibid.*, p. 59.

³*In Spite Of*, p. 35.

⁴*Letters to Louis Wilkinson 1935-1956*, 1958, pp. 229, 231, 232 & 259 and *In Spite Of*, pp. 35, 69, 100, 103, 105, 268-9 and 281.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 344.

⁶*Letters to Henry Miller*, pp. 42-3.

⁷R. H. Blyth, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*, Tokyo, 1964, Preface, p. viii.

⁸*John Cowper Powys: Letters 1937-1954*, ed. Iorwerth C. Peate, 1974, p. 72.

⁹*Obstinate Cymric*, pp. 177-8.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

¹¹*Autobiography*, 1934, pp. 497-8.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 523.

¹³Powys admired Buddha, calling him "the prophet of the pure intellect" and "Kohinoor of wisdom" in *Up and Out*, 1957, pp. 61 & 62.

¹⁴*The Meaning of Culture*, p. 186.

¹⁵*Autobiography*, p. 642.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁷*The Meaning of Culture*, pp. 185-6.

¹⁸*A Philosophy of Solitude*, pp. 149-150.

¹⁹*Mortal Strife*, p. 173.

²⁰*The Art of Growing Old*, p. 208.

²¹*In Spite Of*, pp. 238-9.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 66.

²³*Mortal Strife*, p. 132.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁶*In Spite Of*, p. 197.

²⁷*Autobiography*, p. 649.

²⁸*The Art of Growing Old*, p. 103.

²⁹*Obstinate Cymric*, pp. 99-100.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 177.

³¹*Lucifer*, 1956, p. 105.

³²*Mortal Strife*, p. 113.

³³*Up and Out*, p. 69.

³⁴*All or Nothing*, 1960, p. 199.

³⁵*Two and Two*, 1974, p. 40.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁷*You and Me*, 1975, p. 57.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 71, 76 and 80.

³⁹*John Cowper Powys's Letters to Nicholas Ross*, 1971, p. 137.

⁴⁰*The Art of Growing Old*, p. 73.

⁴¹*In Spite Of*, p. 43.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.

⁴³*Homer and the Aether*, p. 29.

⁴⁴*Real Wraiths*, 1974, p. 92.

⁴⁵*Letters of J. C. Powys to L. Wilkinson*, p. 232.

⁴⁶*In Spite Of*, p. 103.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 35.

Cicely Hill

“Susukeshi Hina Mo”:

John Cowper Powys and the Chuang-Tse Legacy

John Cowper Powys has, since his essay “Philosopher Kwang” in 1923, made a number of respectful references to the Taoist sage Chuang-Tse. In his *Rabelais* we find this tribute:

Rabelais thus lost at the end of the prologue that wise lightness which has no rival save in the writings of Chuang-Tze.¹

Later he remarks that a less grudging welcome may be given to Rabelais’ “transference of reverence” from sex, religion and fastidious decency (which are only “symbols for what lies beyond time and space”) to life, when we associate life with the “humble, earthy, rustic quietism advocated in the Classics of Chinese Taoism”.² Words of Chuang-Tze remind him of the description of the “noble, almost Quakerish quietism of Pantagruel”.³

It was to Chuang-Tze that he dedicated his third novel, *Ducdame*, with the words:

Dedicated to that superior man Kuang-Tze of Khi-Yuan. The only one among philosophers to be at once respectful to his spirit-like ancestors and indulgent to those who, like the protagonist of this book, go where they are pushed, follow where they are led, like a whirling wind, like a feather tossed about, like a revolving grindstone.⁴

We learn most about Powys’s view of Taoism in *Obstinate Cymric* where he makes some ten or more points of comparison between the Welsh and Chinese cultures.

Taoism gave birth to Chinese Zen which has developed and flowered in Japan to be realised in its highest form in *Haiku*, that form of Japanese poetry which R. H. Blyth, a contemporary of Powys, described as “the

final flower of all Eastern culture . . . also a way of living”.⁵

As we see from his correspondence with Professor Ichiro Hara, John Cowper Powys did not particularly take to the writing of Blyth nor to Haiku. In his essay on Senryu, R. H. Blyth writes of the untranslatable Japanese word *shibui* which describes restraint, of the latent rather than dynamic energy of the Japanese, of their understatement rather than Hyperbole and of their union with nature that requires no mysticism. None of this suggests John Cowper Powys, the writer nor the man, but the intuitive eye of Haiku is precisely what Powys sees as the eye of Kwang’s humorous hopping bird. In examining his comparisons of the Welsh and Chinese cultures it may be seen how far they apply also to the culture of Japan and how close are many of his ideas to those expressed by R. H. Blyth in his interpretations of Zen Haiku.

Those “wonderful anecdotes of symbolic and cosmogenic beings”⁶ which Powys finds in the oral traditions of Wales and China are indeed absent from Japanese literature. The Shinto cosmology is not an attractive one and Japanese literature has developed along other lines. But next on John Cowper Powys’s list of characteristics common to the Welsh and Chinese cultures, “a particular kind of wistful irony and familiar sad humour”, is ever and abundantly present in Japanese life and poetry and is an important part of the haiku-sense. In his *Autobiography* Powys prefaces a paragraph:

“Isn’t it sad”, as the Chinese sage Kwang-Tze always exclaims, in the whimsical-wistful way . . .⁷

In just such a way do the Japanese say "Shikataganai . . ."—"Since it must be so . . ."

Powys tells us how important in the *Mabinogi* is the word *cynneddf* or "peculiarity" and of the "whimsical and fatalistic indulgence for natural and supernatural faults and frailties that is a spiritual secret such as only very ancient and very civilized races comprehend".⁸ R. H. Blyth tells us that throughout his own works he uses the word "Zen" to mean "that state of mind in which we are not separated from other things, are indeed identical to them, and yet retain our own individual and personal peculiarities".⁹

Japan has not like China and Wales been invaded, but John Cowper Powys might be describing her ghostly mountains and plains and the minds of her people when he writes of

. . . rains and mists which have the power of modulating and transforming the very sun and moon themselves, while human nature, in other races the one constant and unvaried element, becomes amid these wavering and fluctuating vapours as evasive and hard to seize as the thin rain of Tegid-Llyn.¹⁰

Common to all three races certainly is reverence for scholarship. The Eisteddfodau, in Powys's view, illustrates the people's passion for three things: "the scholarly art of judging literary composition, the keeping up of all the old ritualistic traditions and the social enjoyment of communal choregic music". These are all present in Japan: in traditional poetry competitions held with formal seriousness on New Year's Day in the Emperor's household, in sport, religious observance and in the Noh theatre which, like a meeting of the Bards, combines lyricism with ritual solemnity.

"Welsh culture, deserted by the Welsh aristocracy, restored itself, like Titus Antaeus, by touching the earth".¹¹ John Cowper Powys speaks of Welsh homesteads as being the cradles of scholars, bards and preachers. Such "touching of the earth" could be seen nowhere more vividly than in

a Zen monastery, and here is what R. H. Blyth says of the coming of haiku:

The Japanese, by an accident of geography, and because of something in their national character, took part in the developments of this 'return to nature', which in the Far East began (to give them a local habitation and a name) with Eno, the 6th Chinese Patriarch of Zen, 637-713 AD. The Chinese, again because of their geography perhaps, have always had a strong tendency in poetry and philosophy towards the vast and the vague, the general and sententious. It was left, therefore, to the Japanese to undertake this 'return to things' in haiku, but what we return to is never the same as what we left, for we have ourselves changed in the meantime. So we go back to the old savage animism and superstition, and common life of man and spirits and trees and stones, and yet there is a difference. Things have taken on something of the tenuous nature of the abstractions they turned into. Again, spring and autumn, for example, non-existent, arbitrary distinctions, have attained a body and palpability they never before had. We also, we are the things,—and yet we are ourselves, in a perpetual limbo of heaven and hell. It was necessary for us to prostrate ourselves before the Buddha, to spend nine long years wall-gazing, to be born in the Western Paradise. But now, no more. Now we have come back from Nirvana to this world, the only one.¹²

We might substitute "Golden Age", "Cronos-sleep" with these Buddhist phrases. We return, says Blyth, "to the friends of our childhood, the rain on the window-pane; the long silent roads at night; the waves of the shore that never cease to fall; the moon so near and yet so far; all the sensations of texture, timbre, weight and shape, those previous and inexhaustible riches of everyday life".¹² A very Powys passage.

The Powys-hero Dud No-Man, moving in the limbo of heaven and hell which is life, resolves to "hold to the centre" as he moves on, for "The future's not everything". He knows that there is no barrier to break through as his father, Uryen Quirm, believed. Uryen was still in that land of old, strange

animism and superstition, sinking to his death under the weight of it.

“We couldn’t think of a barrier if there weren’t something in us *already outside* it!” “If you have a stick I will give you one. If you have no stick I will take it away.” says Zen.¹⁴

John Cowper Powys composes a Triad:

The three Peculiarities of a Welsh farm is the power to produce preachers who praise God, poets who criticise the preachers who praise God, and scholars who criticise the poets who criticise the preachers who praise God.¹⁵

Taoism had its fair share of sages, poets and critics and often enough the farms produced them. Lao-Tzu wrote of Chuang-Tze (who is called Soshi in Japanese):

Soshi reduces all things to one;
I believe that in unity there is adversity;
Though by their own nature they live in equal happiness,
A phoenix is slightly superior to a snake.¹⁶

Basho, one of the three great haiku masters of Japan, whom Blyth compares with Thomas Hardy, says:

Do not follow in the footsteps of the Ancients;
Seek what they taught.¹⁷

The final passage of the chapter of *Obstinate Cymric* comparing the Welsh and Chinese cultures contains a lengthy quotation of Khich-yu’s critical outcry as he passed Confucius’s door. John Cowper Powys finds the protest profoundly Welsh. It is also profoundly Zen, for Zen had long transcended Confucianism to which it was indebted; but the most significant thing about the Taoist’s outcry is his advice to “avoid publicity”. The Welsh, says Powys, have remained less advertised, less public, less revealed in their secret soul than any race in the world—except the Chinese. The following passage by R. H. Blyth illustrates a sort of reticence or non-publicity:

Thus the word ‘Way’, especially with a capital letter is like all metaphors, not merely misleading but the very error of the moon.

The Japanese, who are even less philosophical than the Chinese, and more poetical, have always stressed the particular, the concrete. ‘Have a cup of tea!’ The tea is of course the universe, but we must pretend that it is not. The sound of the water when the frog jumps into the old pond is the music of the spheres, but we mustn’t say so.

When tea is drunk, the universe is swallowed; the tea *is* the universe; it doesn’t stand for it.¹⁸

Powys’s writing is full of what R. H. Blyth calls haiku-spirit—“the poetical attitude of mind of the haiku poets, their way of life, their ‘religion’.” He uses a description of the Polynesian “mana” from Archer’s *Faiths Men Live By* to convey the nature of Zen and its relation to poetry:

‘Mana’ is everywhere, intangible and all-pervasive as the ether. All things have it; rather, each separate thing is manaized, for *mana* is not a spiritual entity in a physical body; it is a dynamism which permeates, *of* the arrow, *of* the poison on the arrowhead; and that which kills is not the poison, the arrow, but *mana*. *Mana*, however, is not a universal something, a portion of which imbues each object . . . the primitive . . . acts in response to immediate, concrete situations and things—to objects *mana*-saturated, whether stream, stone, mountain, cloud, plant, animal. Furthermore, *mana* itself has no moral quality; rather it may be good or bad, favourable or dangerous, according to the time or place; it may do good or evil, according to the agent’s will. It is seen in operation when a man, attempting the strange and ‘impossible’ succeeds.¹⁹

“Here”, says Blyth, “we feel something of the intangibility, indefinability, non-thingness, non-abstractness, non-morality and non-rationality of Zen”. We also feel the presence of something that occurs in at least three forms in Powys’s thought. It may be in the essence of one of those exterior objects at which we happen to be looking—that patch of tall grasses and yellow hawkweed with which a discarded fragment of cardboard is entangled and a cuckoo-spit is suspended. It may be in an object more charged with homely ritual use,

like sheets daily turned down in the Homeric scene, or those idiosyncratically fetishized objects like Dud No-Man's kettle, 'The Royal Martyr',²⁰ or "The Pick the Spade, the Fork, the Rake, the Hoe and the *very good* Wheelbarrow!" of Sylvanus Cobbold;²¹ it may be in objects maniaized by erotic musings, like Wizzie's faded blue tights,²² or by aversions and loathings like the tea-cup which Mr. Malakite traced with his finger²³ or the louse on Old Funky's scalp.²⁴ The non-moral quality, "favourable or dangerous, according to time or place doing good or ill . . ." describes well the rake that killed Rook Ashover,²⁵ the sinister carvings from Dud No-Man's mother's bed-head,²⁶ Christie Malakite's mirror,²⁷ Christie herself!

But haiku, says Blyth, is haiku; Zen and poetry are almost synonymous but "if there is ever imagined to be any conflict between Zen and the poetry of haiku, then Zen goes overboard; poetry is the ultimate standard."²⁸ Haiku, he says, "belongs to a tradition of looking at things, a way of living, a certain tenderness and smallness of mind that avoids the magnificent, the infinite, the eternal".²⁹ This is not to say that haiku reduces the vast to the insignificant or shallow but that it does not usually make the infinite its subject. In his description of an incident in the life of Lung-tan, Blyth's commentary goes:

A dragon is not dreadful,—not a real one. An abyss is not frightening, an infinitely deep one. What is dreadful is the thought that the universe has not the power to save itself; what is frightful is the (scientific) thought that the universe is shallow and limited. It was this fear that drove Nietzsche mad.³⁰

Powys jealously defies Einstein to deprive us of our sensation of infinity—"the sublime nothing which from eternity has encompassed our everything". And he denies the theological "truth" of "that circle whose centre is everywhere, the truth of the 'block universe', the truth of the Absolute."³¹

Chuang-Tze wrote:

A boat hidden in a creek (is safe), even so something strong may bear it away at midnight. The hiding of small things in large ones is all right, but they may get lost. If on the other hand you hide the universe in the universe itself, there is no place where it can be lost. This is the Great Nature of things.³²

Blyth:

Haiku, and not haiku alone, but the whole of Japanese literature are aimed at the same infinity as that of the Western world of the last five centuries, but not through space, not through the horizon. It is in the infinite grasped in the hand, before the eyes, in the hammering of a nail, the touch of cold water, the smell of chrysanthemums, the smell of *this* chrysanthemum.³³

When Powys looks at infinity it is not through space, not through *the* horizon but through the space around and beyond the meeting of *this* sky with *this* beach—Chesil Beach.

The differences between the life and mood of haiku and that of the Chinese sages lies, in Blyth's opinion, in

the concreteness and abstractness respectively of their vision of reality. In haiku the intellectual element is absent, or is so completely fused with the intuitive-poetical element that no analysis can separate them.³⁴

Sylvanus Cobbold

received a final revelation then of what he had often suspected, namely that the Absolute was to be found in the concrete and not in the abstract, in thought dipped in the life-juice, and not in thought gasping in vacuo.³⁵

"The real nature of man's mind is delight". These were the words of the Japanese Confucianist Tojo Nakae. Luke Anderson, in *Wood and Stone*, is embraced by the delights of an August day in Weymouth. The reader of *In Defence of Sensuality* is bidden to will his delight, assuming the ritual posture with grim satisfaction, despite "hindrances, distractions, discomforts, and even serious

suffering”.³⁶ And even if happiness itself is not forthcoming, he arrives at the familiar “landscape of happiness”.³⁷

Throwing in a halfpenny
I borrowed the temple veranda
In the evening cool.³⁸

In this haiku by Shiki the poetry is “in the sphere where the tinkling of the metal on the wood of the great alms-box, the coolness of the gusty wind, are perceived by the same sense”. In this sphere he comes as near as he will ever come to John Cowper Powys’s saint who, alone, can enjoy “that magical . . . sensation of being free from remorse”.³⁹

R. H. Blyth lists thirteen characteristics of the haiku state of mind. The first of these are Selfishness, Loneliness, Humour and Non-Morality.

Selfishness

Standing still
The voices of frogs
Heard in the distance too.⁴⁰

“In truth” Blyth says, “the frogs are silent; it is the frog-nature of the poet which is suddenly heard speaking in his breast. This selflessness is the immediate and sufficient cause of selfishness. Interpenetration with all things”.⁴¹

Chuang-Tze says:

Only ‘he who has arrived’ knows and understands that all things are one. He does not take himself as separate from things, but identifies himself with them in their essential activity.

It is deep Autumn:
My neighbour—
How does he live, I wonder?⁴¹

This haiku by Basho shows his concern for a neighbour in whose plight he identifies himself. Wolf Solent visits Tilly Valley:

The whole house looked as if its owner had long relinquished every kind of effort to get

that personal happiness out of life which is the inheritance of the meanest. Its shabby desolation seemed to project, in opposition to every human instinct, a forlorn emptiness which was worse than squalor. Its effect on Wolf’s senses was ghastly. No one could conceive a return to such a house as a return ‘home’! What it meant was that this wretched little priest *had no home*.⁴²

His pity is soon to be lost in his recognition of the fact that T. E. Valley could live in a prison, an asylum or a slave-galley, for “The fellow’s a saint! He’s got hold of it”.⁴³ It is a Zen precept that none of us has a home. Wolf’s Zen, however, is in the quality of his pity for the priest. There is selflessness in Powys’s determination to enjoy what could be the most irritating of ludicrous habits and appearances in those with whom we come into closest contact, and the selfishness which is the obverse side of this practice is the very soul of the paradox of Zen.

When we look at selfishness and selflessness removed from their moral associations we see how Powys’s cavoseniargizing⁴⁴ and cosmogonizing⁴⁵ are themselves selfless acts.

“Haiku”, Blyth says, “are (the) ‘thou art it’; when a man becomes a bamboo grove swaying in the windy rain, a cicada crying itself and its life away, then he is ‘it’”.⁴⁶

And yet as the train rushed forward, it seemed [to Wolf Solent] as if his real self were neither giant nor snake; but rather that black-budded ash-tree, still in the rearward of its leafy companions, whose hushed grey branches threw so contorted a shadow upon the railway bank.⁴⁷

In Maiden Castle

. . . Mr. Quirm had got the bottom of his coat rumped up above the seat of his trousers, and these little rose-tinged petals peeped out from beneath his rump in a manner that was distressing to the man.

Dud did not go quite so far as to entreat his parent to move, though the phrase; ‘Excuse me, sir, but you’re sitting on a daisy’, hovered on the tip of his tongue.⁴⁸

When Wizzie was being assaulted by Old Funky she heard, or thought she heard, the whinnying of her old circus horse.⁴⁹

In the hearing of Taiga,
The cheep of the fallen fledgeling
Mingles with the chirping
Of the mother sparrow.

Blyth comments that it is the exchanged cries which save the poem from sentimentality. "The young one cannot return to the nest; the mother is afraid to leave it. What can we do? What God does, look on or look away in silence."⁵⁰ That is what John Cowper Powys had to do when he saw the boy being bullied in the boat off Weymouth.

The next on Blyth's list of Haiku-spirit qualities is *Grateful Acceptance* of "all that is inside us and outside us, our own shortcomings as well as those of others".

Not to false religion nor to science must we go to find reality, but to poetry, where we find it in the most unlikely places, "—in the perverse denial of truth, and the impossible desires of human beings. But at all the extremes of thought and feeling there arises the perception that the active acceptance of the inevitable is life, the life of perfection."⁵¹

John Cowper Powys enjoins us again and again to defy the First Cause. But his defiance of the First Cause is also an acceptance, as the words "In spite of" imply. Myrddin says to the child Neb, "I never took up arms against anything but the tyranny of heaven"⁵² and the difference between his philosophy and the haiku spirit is one of posture. John Cowper Powys's brave technique is not only to enjoy the desirable things of life to the full in spite of the troublesome and loathsome ones, but, as far as possible, to make what is tiresome also the subject of private joy. In "Philosopher Kwang" he says of the Philosopher's humour, "It is at once his rebellion against what is intolerable in life and his way of escaping into a freer world."

When a certain gratitude is applied to things, says Blyth,

this is poetry. When it is applied to things as a whole it is religion, but haiku and Zen are different from both in this respect, that they deal with everything as all things. When one thing is taken up in the mind, all things are to be present there. The feeling that is attendant upon such a state of mind is gratitude.⁵³

Wolf Solent has lost Gerda and Christie and, perhaps, his "mythology". He is in the buttercup field, a golden fragment of the West country and he cries "It is a god!"

What he longed to do was to plunge his own hands into this Saturnian gold, and to pour it out, over Mr. Urquhart, over Mattie, over Miss Gault, over Jason, over all the nameless little desolations—broken twigs, tortured branches, wounded reptiles, injured birds, slaughtered beasts.

'It's my body that has saved me' he thought; and as if to assure these patient senses that his spirit was grateful, he abstractedly pinched his thigh above the knee with his left hand.⁵⁴

Rook Ashover is visited by similar feelings in the night when, among the water-meadows and barley-fields,

He felt a sense of inexpressible gratitude to the gods that he had ever known the people of his life.⁵⁵

Blyth quotes Arnold's poem, *A Wish*.

The world which was ere I was born
The world which lasts when I am dead,
Which never was a friend to *one*
Nor promised love it could not give,
But lit for all its generous sun,
And lived itself and made us live.⁵⁶

"But this word generous", he says, "expresses a warm feeling of unity in which the giving and receiving are one. The sun which shines without us lives within us . . . And so quite rightly we can command the sun to shine . . . We not only gratefully accept but gently order those things to happen which must happen . . . There are indeed four attitudes to the world (depending on our attitude to our own being): opposition, resignation, co-operation, and domination. We are continually moving among them. Zen is the last."⁵⁷ John Cowper Powys i

continually moving among them and while opposition and domination are characteristic of his attitude towards the tyranny of heaven, his evasive action and will to endure by the exercise of imaginative cunning have in them distinct elements of the other two. He uses the things of the world to cope with the world. Even his projections into space are earth-anchored. This, in Zen terms, is co-operation.

Loneliness is an essential of the haiku-state and loneliness is as desirable as it is inevitable.

“You are completely alone”, Powys tells the reader of *In Defence of Sensuality*. “That is the beginning and end of everything, and I must beg you . . . to recognise this ultimate fact.”⁵⁸

Loneliness is also implied in the state of interpenetration with all things. Basho entertains the solitary mountain bird:

Ah kankodori
Deepen thou
My loneliness.⁵⁹

Issa addresses this haiku to a sparrow:

Come and play with me,
Fatherless, motherless
Sparrow.⁶⁰

Issa was himself an orphan but “over and above this is the fact that all things animate and inanimate are alone, are orphaned in the very fact of coming into existence, of being finite. Nevertheless”, says Blyth, “since ‘some strange comfort every state attends’, in another sense, everything is our mother and father, everything ‘loves’ us”. This love is described in Powys’s phrase “We become what we behold”, but nothing more personal, nor more possessive.⁶¹

The lonely characters of Powys’s fiction can be divided into those who guard and treasure their intrinsic solitude, among whose number are all the “Powys-heroes”, and those who have not come to terms with their loneliness, a great many of whom are, significantly, women.

But “Alone, alone, alone!” and only

alone can we “return to the calm reservoirs of earth, air, water and fire from which . . . emerge those lovely essences, the constant enjoyment of which constitutes the only indestructible ecstasy of life.”⁶²

Winter seclusion:
Once again I will lean against
This post.⁶³

Along this road
Goes no one
This autumn eve.⁶⁴

Basho

Humour is not obvious in the works of John Cowper Powys nor in haiku poetry; in neither of them does humour often break out, but the sense of it is there, and the quality of humour is very similar in both cases. It is gentle, unmalicious, irreligious, sometimes ludicrous, never elitist.

Dr. Fingal Raughty in *Rodmoor* is a humorous character but humour is almost entirely absent from Jason Otter (of *Wolf Solent*) whom he resembles in many ways, including his liking for a rhubarb leaf to protect his head from the sun. Jason is malign and becomes pitiable. Powys’s characters can act in a ludicrous way and yet retain a special kind of ludicrous dignity. Johnny Geard (of *A Glastonbury Romance*) and Sylvanus Cobbold (of *Weymouth Sands*) are to be regarded with cosmic relish rather than amusement. Powys’s eccentrics are a very Zen bunch.

Haiku is full of rustic humour and often depends on imagery for its point.

The turnip-puller
Points the way
With a turnip.⁶⁴

Lobby Torp tells his mother:

‘Mr. Valley said I was to ask you proper and right for promission, promission for—’
‘For *what*, ye staring toad?’
‘Promission . . . for thik girt play next Thursday. The day arter tomorrow ’tis; and all the gentry be coming. And I be John the Baptist, what lived upon honey and the honey-comb!’

'Ye'll live upon cabbage and the cabbage-stalk, ye impudent sprout! I've a-heerd too much of your Mr. Valley and his goings on.'⁶⁵

The evening-glory is a sort of flower and:

The young girl
Blew her nose
In the evening-glory.⁶⁶

The humour here is touching and pure.

There is quiet sanity in this haiku:

The Buddha on the moor,
From the end of his nose
Hangs an icicle,⁶⁷

in Issa's,

Grasshopper!
Be the keeper of the graveyard
When I die⁶⁸

and in the seriousness with which John Cowper Powys assures us: "There is no earthly reason why we should not be able to conceal completely from our friends and relations that we are St. Paul."⁶⁹

The spirit of haiku is expressed in his words about the Pantagruelian spirit which "combines the indulgent common-sense of old age with childhood's power of recreating the world afresh every day; recreating it out of a free chaos where two and two *can* make five, and people *can* eat their cake and have it. As with the little Gargantua, something in Rabelais's genius

Combed its head with a bowl . . . picked its teeth with a wooden shoe . . . pissed against the sun . . . would say the ape's pater-noster . . . scratched itself where it didn't itch . . . always looked a gift-horse in the mouth" [and, the most Zen one of all:] "hid itself in the water against the rain."⁷⁰

Non-Morality

Magnus Muir is lying in bed thinking of the feelings of certain people whom he has encountered during the day: "They all belonged to something fatal in the world that turns to sorrow and grief as involuntarily as the compass needle turns to

the North."⁷¹ Sorrow and grief visit us not because we have done wrong, though imprudence and ignorance may add to our troubles. It is not really much use praying to God (or chanting sutras). Certain observations may help so long as they are our own. We must hold on to our determination to enjoy things and we may select the objects for our enjoyment quite arbitrarily, for any are as good as any others.

To enjoy the wart on an elderly relative's nose is in good haiku-spirit. A poem on the subject could well be a haiku. There is nothing moral about this though it may be, on the whole, a kindly exercise since it prevents feelings of irritation or hatred towards the relative. Wordsworth's leech-gatherer's swollen legs are 'haiku' though the poem, being moral, is not.

The old man
Hoeing the field,
Has his head-gear on crooked.⁷²

Kito

Blyth points out the danger of imagining that such trivial incidents stand as symbols of the greater aspects of nature or man.

This cannot be so, since the symbol and that which is symbolized would be separate from each other; there would be disunity . . . The crookedness of what the old man is wearing on his head is due to age. He is indifferent to what he looks like as are all other people except the poet. What does the poet see? He sees the old man's head-apparel worn crookedly; he sees that particular old man wearing it on one side. That is all, and that seeing is the poetry . . . Keep the eye *steadily* on the object.

John Cowper Powys gives exactly the same advice.

Slightly more complicated but similarly free from moral implications is Magnus Muir's ability to see things in a certain way, a way which, with all its associations, is faithful to life:

It had something to do with seizing upon some dominant or poetical aspect of the

physical present, such as the sea-wind now blowing into his room, such as the dying coals, such as that bulge of the red curtains, and drawing from it a fresh, a simple, a childish enchantment—the mystery of life reduced to the most primitive terms—that was able to push back . . . all the emotional and mental troubles of life.⁷³

The demands that John Cowper Powys makes on us to accept his moral judgements are very few. The events of *Maiden Castle*, for example, are satisfying whether or not we see it as only to be expected that a man who buys a girl from a circus and indulges his romantic sense by thinking of her as an ancient British slave should, in the end, be the lonely one.

What we are never allowed to imagine is that our hero could, by any folly, forfeit his ability to delight in the world by looking on it in “a certain way”.⁷⁴

The only moral evil with which haiku poets concern themselves is cruelty and, though it is obviously not in their nature to describe or explicitly condemn cruel practices, they remark that men tend to weep when certain things are done.

How exciting, the cormorant fishing boat!
But after a time
I felt saddened.⁷⁵

Issa combines practicality within ethics:

Striking the fly
I hit also the flowering plant.⁷⁶

The implications of the following haiku by Seibi are more far-reaching and it is interesting that Walter de la Mare records having had a very similar experience:*

Killing flies,
I begin to wish
To annihilate them all.⁷⁷

*“A later memory is of massacring, like a juvenile Caligula not merely an arrogant array of purple-turbaned thistles with a kitchen knife, but all the domestic flies within reach with a kitchen duster: ‘I say, beware. If yet another of ye settle on my hand!’ Of this kind of challenge ultimatums are made.” (*Early One Morning*, W. de la Mare, Faber, 1935, p. 303).

I have called this essay “Susukeshi hina mo” which means “The two grimy dolls also”. The haiku, by Issa, goes:

Katasumi ni
Susukeshi hina mo
Fufu hana

The two grimy dolls
In the corner also,
Are man and wife.⁷⁸

The Japanese share John Cowper Powys's reverence for these objects who mysteriously embody so many of the other haiku qualities on R. H. Blyth's list—wordlessness, simplicity, materiality, non-intellectuality, courage.

Mary Crow thinks of John as one of her old, faded, wooden dolls;⁷⁹ Uryen Quirm knows intuitively the nature of Lovey's imaginings about her doll⁸⁰ and Neb-ap-Digon tells Myrddin that he can tell a Brython child from a Gwyddyl-Ffichti as “A Brython child never trusts its doll to anybody else”.⁸¹

Here are two more doll haiku with Blyth's comments.

Lighting the light,—
The shadow of the dolls,
One for each.

Shiki

“This is my idea of what a haiku should be,—something that catches the eye of the mind, a mere nothing, but unforgettably significant, indeed, with this significance in inverse proportion to its practical importance, its size, its longevity. Each doll has a shadow, its own, its very own shadow; and having it, there is a bond between the dolls, between them and all other things.”⁸²

Finally, by Issa:

Amamori wo
Nanto obuso zo
Hiinatachi?

Rain is leaking in:
What do you think of it
Assembled dolls?

"If the dolls could answer, they would say, 'We think that the rain leaks in, and that we are dolls'."⁸³

Notes

- ¹*Rabelais*, Bodley Head, 1948, p. 106.
²*Ibid.*, p. 369.
³*Ibid.*, p. 369.
⁴*Ducdame*, Grant Richards,
⁵R. H. Blyth, *Haiku*, Hokuseido, Tokyo, 1947-1952, Vol. 1., Preface p. iii.
⁶*Obstinate Cymric*, Village Press, 1973, p. 51.
⁷*Autobiography*, Macdonald, 1934, p. 53.
⁸*Obstinate Cymric*, p. 52.
⁹*Haiku*, Vol. 1., Preface p. iii.
¹⁰*Obstinate Cymric*, p. 52.
¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 53.
¹²*Haiku*, Vol. 1., Preface p. ii.
¹³*Maiden Castle*, Macdonald, 1936, p. 493.
¹⁴*Haiku*, Vol. 1., Preface p. ix.
¹⁵*Obstinate Cymric*, p. 54.
¹⁶*Haiku*, Vol. 1., p. 61.
¹⁷*Haiku*, Vol. 1., p. 329.
¹⁸R. H. Blyth, *Zen and the Zen Classics*, Hokuseido, 1960-1964, Vol. II., p. 196.
¹⁹*Haiku*, Vol. 1., Preface p. iv.
²⁰*Maiden Castle*, p. 23.
²¹*Weymouth Sands*, Rivers Press, 1973, p. 389
²²*Maiden Castle*, p. 46 and p. 127.
²³*Wolf Solent*, Macdonald, 1961, p. 324.
²⁴*Maiden Castle*, p. 43.
²⁵*Ducdame*, 1925, p. 440.
²⁶*Maiden Castle*, p. 17.
²⁷*Wolf Solent*, p. 442.
²⁸*Haiku*, Vol. 1., Preface p. v.
²⁹*Ibid.*, Preface p. iv.
³⁰*Zen and the Zen Classics*, p. 30.
³¹*Rabelais*, p. 90.
³²*Haiku*, Vol. 1., p. 35.
³³*Ibid.*, Preface p. xiii.
³⁴*Ibid.*, Preface p. v.
³⁵*Weymouth Sands*, p. 402.
³⁶*In Defence of Sensuality*, Gollancz, 1930, p. 15.
³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 15.
³⁸*Haiku*, Vol. 1., Preface p. xii.
³⁹*In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 62.
⁴⁰*Haiku*, Vol. 1., p. 166.
⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 167.
⁴²*Wolf Solent*, p. 131.
⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 133.
⁴⁴*Porius*, Macdonald, 1951, p. 403.
⁴⁵*In Spite Of*, Macdonald, 1953, p. 90.
⁴⁶*Haiku*, Vol. 1., p. 6.
⁴⁷*Wolf Solent*, p. 5.
⁴⁸*Maiden Castle*, p. 245.
⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 297.
⁵⁰*Haiku*, Vol. 2, p. 225.
⁵¹*Haiku*, Vol. 1, p. 181.
⁵²*Porius*, p. 277.
⁵³*Haiku*, Vol. 1, p. 187.
⁵⁴*Wolf Solent*, p. 613.
⁵⁵*Ducdame*, p. 432.
⁵⁶*Haiku*, p. 187.
⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 188.
⁵⁸*In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 6.
⁵⁹*Haiku*, p. 172.
⁶⁰*Haiku*, Vol. 2, p. 228.
⁶¹*In Defence of Sensuality*,
⁶²*Haiku* Vol. 2. p. 321.
⁶³*Haiku* Vol. 1. p. 179.
⁶⁴*Haiku*, Vol. 4. p. 348.
⁶⁵*Wolf Solent*, p. 246.
⁶⁶*Haiku*, Vol. 1., p. 223.
⁶⁷*Haiku*, Vol. 4. p. 304.
⁶⁸*Haiku*, Vol. 3. p. 50.
⁶⁹*In Spite Of*, p. 152.
⁷⁰*Rabelais*, p. 284.
⁷¹*Weymouth Sands*, p. 39.
⁷²*Haiku*, Vol. 2., p. 163.
⁷³*Weymouth Sands*, p. 39.
⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 40.
⁷⁵*Haiku*, Vol. 3. p. 142.
⁷⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. 3. p. 203.
⁷⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. 3. p. 201.
⁷⁸*Haiku*, Vol. 2., p. 149.
⁷⁹*A Glastonbury Romance*, Macdonald, 1955, p. 88.
⁸⁰*Maiden Castle*, p. 319.
⁸¹*Porius*, p. 279.
⁸²*Haiku*, Vol. 2., p. 150.
⁸³*Ibid.*, Vol. 2., p. 150.

John Cowper Powys

The Philosopher Kwang

(*The Dial*, Vol LXXV, No. 5, November 1923)

The older texts of Taoism, as we get them translated by James Legge in Max Muller's Sacred Books of the East, make up but a small fraction of the two volumes in the Oxford Edition devoted to this cult. The larger portion of both these fascinating books is filled with the writings of Kwang-tze, the 'laughing philosopher' of the kingdom of Liang.

The earlier texts are arresting enough to any mystical-minded person; but one cannot help feeling, as one turns these pages, that the real genius of the Taoist tradition is not the legendary Lao-tze, its portentous prophet, but the much more whimsical and irresponsible Kwang, its Voltairian high-priest.

This extraordinary and imaginative man of letters lived, it appears, about three and a half centuries before Christ and about two centuries after Lao-tze and Confucius.

For some mysterious reason, Kwang, compared with his great forerunners, still lacks the homage, still lacks the intellectual recognition, that seem his due. And yet the quality of his thought strikes us as more original, as more imaginative, than that of either Lao-tze or Confucius. Perhaps it is that his chaos-loving thought besieges our purer reason and—it may well be—corrupts it, in the very manner against which the whole elaborate ritual of the Confucian ethics was especially directed!

Very little is known of Kwang's life. He appears to have guarded his freedom from official responsibility with a Montaignesque sagacity; for when a certain monarch sent messengers with large gifts to bring him to Court his response is characteristic of his habits of mind, both in its rudeness and in its quaint gaiety:

'Have you seen the victim-ox for the

sacrifice? It is fed and robed to enter the temple. When the time comes for it to do so, it would prefer to be a little pig; but it cannot get to be so. Go away! Do not soil me with your presence! I would rather enjoy myself in a filthy ditch than be subject to court regulations.'

The most characteristic quality of Kwang's writings in his peculiar sense of humour. This humour is something quite unique in literature; and more than unique to our Western minds!

No doubt other Chinese classics approximate to its penetrating flavour; but



Bust of John Cowper Powys, 1938, by Joachim Karsch

I doubt whether they attain it. It is certainly unmistakably Chinese in its quips and turns; but it is also—surely one cannot be mistaken here—redolent of a certain saltish, turpentine-like pungency which is native to Kwang alone.

Everything that it approaches is given a little twist, a little turn, a perceptibly new taste in the mouth. It is the body and pressure of Kwang's whole mental vision. It is at once his rebellion against what is intolerable in life and his way of escaping into a freer world.

The closeness of the connection between Kwang's humour and Kwang's thought can be seen in his mania for the heterogeneous and the casual, as contrasted with the homogeneous and the inevitable. His philosophy is nothing more nor less than a worship of chaos, tempered by a sly and crafty salutation to whatever 'Unutterable'—beyond all Monism and all Pluralism—may lie behind chaos!

His humour therefore delights to concentrate itself upon the most disconnected and inconsequential details; isolating such details arbitrarily and at random; and yet managing to squeeze out of them a pungent metaphysical sap.

One might indeed compare the humour of Kwang to the fantastic hoppings of a whimsical long-necked bird, who every now and then stands gravely upon some object or another, one thin leg curled up under its tail, with its head and beak twisted grotesquely to one side, and makes its comment on the motley world! The Confucian superiorities of Benevolence and Righteousness, with the rather meticulous moral system which they imply, prove a most provocative source of merriment to this 'queer son of chaos.'

He is never weary of girding at the 'Know-Alls' of life:

'Men all honour that which lies within the sphere of their knowledge, but they do not know their dependence on what lies outside that sphere;—may we not call their case one of great perplexity? Ah! Ah! There is no escaping from this dilemma. So it is! So it is!'

The whimsicality of Kwang's bird-like hoppings through the peat-bogs of chance assumes sometimes an enchanting picturesqueness; but this picturesqueness always seems to float and drift like moon-lit seaweed upon a bottomless ocean of mystery. The following passage, for example, is almost word for word a parallel to William Blake's famous distinction between the power that creates and the eye that records. It is interesting to note, however, the difference between Blake's tempestuous anger with the unimaginative and the querulous, supercilious little sigh with which Kwang dismisses the subject:

'He who uses only the sight of the eyes is acted on by what he sees; it is the intuition of the spirit that gives the assurance of certainty. And yet stupid people rely on what they see, and will have it to be the sentiment of all men;—all their success being with what is external—is it not sad?'

There are many passages in these volumes that compel us to think of Nietzsche's Zarathustra; but the terror of that silver bow is always grandiose and Olympian; whereas the rogueries of Kwang remain rusticated, quizzical, irresponsible, as if Pan himself were scratching little moral vignettes on the bark of the beech-trees, indulging now and again in a skip of his goat-shanks when his mischiefs especially tickle his fancy.

'Tung-kwo asked Kwang, saying, "Where is what you call the Tao to be found?" Kwang replied, "Everywhere." The other said, "Specify an instance of it—that will be more satisfactory." "It is here in this ant." "Give a lower instance." "It is in this panic-grass." "Give a still lower instance." "It is in this earthenware tile." "Surely that is the lowest instance?" "It is in that excrement!" To this Tung-kwo gave no reply.'

But there are passages too, where, as in some piece of discordant Russian music, we grow conscious of a singular trembling of the veil of Isis:

'Starlight asked Non-entity, saying, "Master, do you exist? Or do you not exist?" He got no answer to his question,

however, and looked steadfastly to the appearance of the other, which was that of a deep void. All day long he looked to it but could hear nothing; he clutched at it but got hold of nothing. Starlight then said, "Perfect! Who can attain to this? Non-existing non-existence; and non-existing existence! How is it possible to reach to this? Perfect!"

It is a very nice and a very delicate question though one obviously beyond the scope of this sketch, whether the great doctrine of the Tao was actually modified by Kwang; whether in fact, Kwang's Tao departs from the original and orthodox Tao. One suspects that it does depart from this not a little; but Kwang has so plausible a manner of presenting his own temperamental vision that it is very hard to catch him in the act of 'glossing' the older oracles.

For our part we are unable to see why the Taoism of Kwang should not be a finer and deeper philosophy than the Taoism of Lao-tze. It is certainly more daring and more amusing. The Tao probably had interpreters long before Lao-tze appropriated it; and it may well be that what are called the 'Classical Texts of Taoism' represent a philosophical articulation of a much more primitive and mythological cult, towards which the poetic imagination of Kwang fumbles its own way.

His doctrine of the Tao remains in any case, as it is disclosed to us in these extraordinary pages, a piece of human speculation that may be enjoyed on its own merits. What it seems to reveal is nothing less than what may well have been the religion of the human race in some incredibly early period of its history; the worship in plain words, of Chaos and Chance, combined with an awful recognition of Something Unutterable—neither to be named as Existence nor as Nothingness, neither as the One nor as the Many—out of the womb of which Chaos and Chance emerged and into which they will sink.

It is the underlying presence of this Unutterable—a different thing altogether

from the Hindu Brahma—which makes it possible for Kwang to speak as if Life and Death themselves were only temporary aspects of something that was beyond them both, and as if neither Benevolence nor Righteousness could ever reach that depth of clairvoyance which the mere 'lying back' upon one's own essential nature, such as it may be, in unmitigated simplicity and sincerity, can enable us to attain.

Certain enchanting dialogues between mysterious figures that seem to resemble those dehumanized persons that one sees on china tea-cups, take place now and again. We will condense one of these for the reader's benefit:

'Knowledge had rambled northwards to the region of the Dark Water where he ascended the Imperceptible Slope, when it happened that he met Dumb Inaction. He addressed him, saying, "How do we know the Tao? Where do we find our rest in the Tao? Where is the path to the Tao?" Dumb Inaction gave him no reply. Not only did he not answer; but he did not know how to answer. Knowledge then ascended the height of the End of Doubt where he saw Heedless Blurter, to whom he put his questions. Heedless Blurter replied at once, "Ah! I know and I will tell you." But while he was about to speak, he forgot what he wanted to say. Knowledge returned to the palace of Ti and he saw Hwang-ti, and Hwang-ti said, "To dwell nowhere and to do nothing is the first step; to start from nowhere and pursue no path is the first step—Dumb Inaction was truly right because he did not know the thing. Heedless Blurter was nearly right because he forgot it. I and you are not nearly right because we know it." Heedless Blurter heard of all this and considered that Hwang-ti knew how to express himself on the subject.'

It is strange how, in the historic struggle for survival among human ideas, a philosophy as delicately original as that of Kwang should have fallen by the wayside. One cause of this, however, is doubtless inherent in the doctrine itself. It is not for all men, it is not for all moods, this fleeting

phosphorescence of the great waters. To many modern minds the naïveté of the style, the queer twists of the humour, the smiling rigidity of the images, stiff and abrupt as figures on an archaic frieze, will be all that emanates from the writings of Kwang-tze. But to others, to a few here and there, it may well happen that out of these

whispered oracles from the immense past, out of the Ailanthus groves of Mount Kwai-Khi, out of the gardens of Hwang-ti, out of the rivers of Khu-yuan, there will come a hint, a sign, a token, not altogether irrelevant, not altogether without a deep philosophic significance, even for these days, 'so far retired from happy pieties!'

Ian Hughes

Allusion, Illusion, and Reality: Fact and Fiction in *Wolf Solent*

The narrative technique of *Wolf Solent* differs considerably from that of the earlier novels. The whole action is presented from the viewpoint of the central character. While the technique helps to give *Wolf Solent* a coherence that is noticeably lacking in its predecessors, it also provides the author with a problem of narratorial distancing and critical comment. Powys regards Wolf's career ironically, but whenever he presents the behaviour of a character from that character's viewpoint he manifestly lacks a narratorial detachment that implies a degree of authorial criticism. His irony is accordingly rarely to be found in the narrative tone, but is expressed essentially as dramatic irony.

Glen Cavaliero describes the theme of the novel succinctly, and remarks on the narrative problem:

The central theme is the nature of reality and the nature of illusion as mediated through the conflicting claims of the self, with its projections into dream and fantasy, and the claims of other personalities with which that self is surrounded . . . It is narrated throughout from Wolf's point of view. In this way Powys imposes a structural unity upon his long narrative and complexity of material, though at the cost of a blurring of critical vision. Wolf himself is 'placed', and very clearly placed, by a number of different characters; but since it is through his own eyes and ears that we receive those criticisms, their force is lessened. Rather it is to the plot and to the undercurrent of imagery that we must look for education of the author's viewpoint.¹

Having located the author's problem, however, Cavaliero does not give a full account of the manner in which the plot and the undercurrent of imagery create a

richness of dramatic irony. He also does not mention the important role played in that creation by allusions. The multiple dramatic ironies in *Wolf Solent* not only express the author's ironic view of his central character; they also constitute a vital part of the education of the central character in his learning to reconcile "the conflicting claims of the self . . . and the claims of other personalities with which that self is surrounded". Part of Wolf's difficulty in coming to terms with reality, and in understanding the nature of illusion, is indicated by his predisposition to fictionalise whatever he encounters. He transforms the people that he meets into the inhabitants of the fictional worlds with which he is best acquainted; correspondingly, he tends to see himself as playing a role that is analogous to something in those fictional worlds. The many allusions, and particularly the literary allusions, perform a key function in portraying Wolf's romanticising. As Wolf's experience leads him into disillusion, and brings him to understand that his romantic dreams cannot be fulfilled in reality, the literary allusions serve to remind him of the gap between fact and fiction. Ultimately, Wolf learns that, while it is possible to take life-sustaining values from the right fiction, using fiction to obscure reality is foolish and even life-destroying: the proper use of fiction amounts to a subordinate theme in the novel, a theme that is articulated through the literary allusions and Wolf's developing response to them. At the beginning of the novel Wolf, on his way to Dorset, dreams of finding an Imogen to make love to in some idyllic pastoral setting.² At the end of the novel he has come to learn the value of the stoicism of Wordsworth as it is expressed in

the *Intimations of Immortality* ode (641). Between those two contrasting literary visions, which frame the action of the novel, Wolf's sporadic progress from fantasy to a sense of reality receives a subtle commentary by means of allusions that bring into play several alternative literary visions.

Wolf's romanticising, especially in the first half of the novel, is characterised by a great many allusions. For example, Wolf pictures himself working in Urquhart's library by a window that is like that of Madeline's chamber in Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes*;³ he fancies a similarity between Urquhart and the figure of Chaos in Milton's *Paradise Lost*;⁴ he looks out upon a landscape that reminds him of Limbo in Dante's *Inferno* (significantly, he thinks of the fields as "patient" and "melancholy", whereas in *Inferno* it is the spirits inhabiting the fields who are so described).⁵ By the time Wolf has finished his work for Urquhart, however, Wolf's fictionalising has taken on a consciously questioning and bitter aspect. Carrying the manuscript of the scurrilous book that he has compiled for Urquhart, he asks whether he is like the champion William of Deloraine, in Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, carrying the dangerous book of magical spells;⁶ but the heroic vision is soon bitterly rejected, and he thinks of himself as more like the strange and malevolent dwarf in Scott's poem, who finally vanishes without trace.⁷ Although Wolf is still fictionalising, there is an element of self-knowledge and disillusionment that was not present in the earlier and more optimistic fantasising; the ironic rejection of himself as romantic hero indicates a recognition that the world of fairy-tale romance must not be confused with the ordinary reality of Wolf's everyday existence. Wolf's experience in Dorset increasingly persuades him towards an ironic view of his disposition to fictionalise.

Other allusions, as well as characterising Wolf's fictionalising, constitute interrelated series that correspond to important motifs in the development of the novel, and thereby in the development of Wolf. One set

concerns Wolf's obsession with death, while a second concerns Wolf's growing awareness of the grotesquely absurd aspects of his life.

In the plot of the novel, Wolf's obsession with death is manifested by his obsession with two dead persons; one is his father, whose character and history seem to haunt him, and place some sort of personal obligation upon him; the other is Redfern, who was Wolf's predecessor as Urquhart's secretary, and whose rumoured suicide seems at times to prefigure Wolf's suicide.

There are many graveyard scenes in Powys's novels, and *Wolf Solent* has several of them. Wolf himself is not the only character in the novel who is interested in graves. Urquhart is obsessed with Redfern's grave. Selena Gault frequently visits William Solent's grave. Both Selena Gault and Wolf are intrigued by the discovery in the abbey-church of what may be the bones of King Aethelwolf. Gerda's father is a monumental mason and undertaker.

On one occasion Wolf, Wolf's mother, and Gerda visit Redfern's grave. Gerda notices that the grave has been interfered with, perhaps by a mole or rabbit. Gerda's interest leads Mrs Solent to recite, "in a mock-sentimental intonation", a passage from Keats's *Isabella*, a passage that describes Isabella's absorption in the pot of basil that contains her murdered lover's head.⁸ Mrs Solent's recitation is satirically aimed at Gerda, but the words have a disturbing effect on Wolf. The mention of a mole leads Wolf to "mutter something" from *Hamlet*:

'Well said, old mole! canst work i'the earth so fast? A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.'

The *Hamlet* allusion (as will be made clear below) suggests Wolf's concern with a different grave, namely that of his father, but the immediate impact of the allusion is to convey the general nature of Wolf's obsession with corpses: in a sense, he wishes to restore them to life, to use them as living beings. This fantastical characteristic of

play" that takes place at the Smiths' house (317). The question that has arisen is what should be done about Mattie Smith and Olwen, now that Albert Smith is dead. Selena Gault suggests that Olwen, who is the incestuous child of Malakite the bookseller and who was adopted by Albert Smith, should be placed in a Home. She further suggests that Mattie, who is not in fact Albert's daughter but the illegitimate child of Wolf's father, should accompany Olwen. Selena Gault's suggestions seem to Wolf repulsively vindictive. His reaction, however, resembles "the impulse of King Claudius in the play".¹⁵ He wishes to call out "Lights!" and put an end to the disturbing revelation of past immoralities and the expression of present revenge. Wolf is constantly torn between his wish to find out about the past, especially where it concerns his father, and his wish to avoid the burden that such knowledge might place upon him.

The *Hamlet* motif continues with several other allusions.¹⁶ The final one, towards the end of the novel, concerns Lord Carfax, who Wolf feels has stepped in "between the election and his hopes".¹⁷ The allusion implies that Carfax is akin to Shakespeare's Claudius. In the past, Carfax became Mrs Solent's lover, thus usurping William Solent's place. He is now all-powerful, while Wolf seems ineffectual. But the allusion is bitterly ironic, for Wolf is well aware that Carfax has committed no crime; on the contrary, what rankles with Wolf is that Carfax so easily accomplishes what Wolf himself has been longing to accomplish, and sorts out the economic problems of Christie, Olwen, Mrs Solent, and Stalbridge. Wolf has already rejected the Hamlet role for himself. He has earlier "deserted the 'fellow i'the cellarage'", and feels that he has "betrayed his 'old Truepenny'" (551).

The *Hamlet* motif is thus used in a complex manner to characterise Wolf's uncertain feelings about the personal obligations that are placed upon him by past events and their present consequences. As the pattern develops, it corresponds to Wolf's gradual realisation that he has no heroic

role to play, that he is at best a sorry parody of Hamlet, and that the fictionalising of his situation is ridiculous fancy.

As the *Hamlet* motif gradually comes to reflect Wolf's growing disillusion, a *King Lear* motif comes increasingly into operation. It points not to a heroic role for Wolf but to his growing sense of universal absurdity.

The first *King Lear* allusion occurs in Chapter 6. Wolf, disturbed by the notion of becoming involved with Squire Urquhart, is at the same time reluctant to upset arrangements by any sudden change of mind:

After all, why should he worry himself? As the philosophical Duke of Albany murmured in *King Lear*: 'The event! Well . . . The event!'¹⁸

The analogical context must suggest that Wolf may have a great deal to worry about. In the early chapters Wolf still feels "like a spectator rather than a combatant" (123), a feeling that becomes impossible to sustain as matters develop, though ironically the 'event' is a return to the 'philosophical' attitude of Albany, who at the end of the play, like Wolf at the end of the novel, withdraws from all responsibility for other people.

Most of the *King Lear* allusions, however, are made much later in the novel, when the process of Wolf's disillusion is well under way. The next *King Lear* allusion does not occur until Chapter 19. Wolf has been out for a long walk and has been naturally thinking about his life and its problems. He looks in at his mother's window and finds that she is entertaining Mr Manley, who is "snugly ensconced by Mrs Solent's fireside" (448). He fears that when he gets home he will find Bob Weevil similarly ensconced by Gerda's fireside. He then imagines Christie sitting by her fireside, "acting the devoted daughter to Mr Malakite" (449). It has been raining heavily, and by the time Wolf reaches the pigsty near his home the rain has soaked through to his skin. Like Lear during the

storm on the heath, he feels himself very much left out in the cold by the three women in his life: "Three fires and three women—and Mr Wolf Solent leaning against the pigsty!" (449). The analogy with Lear suddenly strikes him, but he is well aware of the difference in scale between Lear's situation and his own:

Then all of a sudden he burst out laughing. 'A comic King Lear! That's what I am! There's nothing tragic about this, Wolf, my friend! What you've got to do is to defy omens and fight for your own hand.'

He rose up erect, tightened his fingers round his stick, and straightened his shoulders. (449)

In the next chapter, Wolf rejects Christie's offer of lovemaking, a disastrous rejection that marks the turning-point in their relationship and brings about the diminishing of Christie's care for him. Just before he leaves her, he recites to her the defiant and pathetic words of Lear to Cordelia in the play's last scene:

'The goujeres shall devour them, flesh and fell, ere they shall make us weep! We'll see 'em starve first!'

He caught her hands and drew her up to her feet with a flashing look that was almost exultant: 'He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven and fire us hence like foxes!'¹⁹

Wolf's behaviour, though it seems to express the passionate intensity of his feelings for Christie, has to seem absurd. It is self-regarding behaviour, hopelessly inadequate as a recompense for the cruel manner in which he has rejected Christie. Not surprisingly, on his way home to Gerda shortly afterwards, Wolf, the comic King Lear, realises what a fool he has been in his treatment of Christie. He regards his fictionalising with a degree of self-contempt:

He had managed to keep his life-illusion. His precious 'mythology' could live still. But at what expense? (474)

Later *King Lear* allusions reflect Wolf's grimly ironic view of himself as a comic

King Lear. The passionate intensity with which he speaks the quotations to Christie is replaced by a sense of absurdity and futility. For instance, at one point he feels that his proper life is over, "so that now he but 'usurped his life'".²⁰ The allusion implies that Wolf is regarding critically any affinity that he has with Lear. As with the Hamlet analogy, the Lear analogy comes to be recognised by Wolf as pointing to the course of his life as an absurd parody of tragedy. To take the analogy seriously is sheer fantasy.

Significantly, the final allusion to *King Lear*, which occurs in the last chapter and which gives the chapter its title, quotes the words not of Lear but of Edgar: "'Ripeness is all'".²¹ Edgar's quiet stoicism matches Wolf's new determination as it is indicated in his adoption of the motto "Endure or escape" (643). In the face of uncertain outcomes, whatever the event, "Men must endure/Their going hence, even as their coming hither".²² There is no suggestion that Wolf is comparing himself to the heroic Edgar. He is no longer fictionalising his life. Instead, he accepts the profound sentiment of the character in *King Lear* who, more than anyone else, represents the clear apprehension of reality. Whether projecting the illusion that he is a mad beggar, or whether taking his father through an illusion of suicide, Edgar is constantly aware of the difference between illusion and reality, and points to the vital importance of recognising that difference.

Like the *Hamlet* motif, then, the *King Lear* motif operates in a complex manner. Both are fully integrated into the substance of the novel, and amount to a rich commentary that serves several purposes. First, they reflect the changing nature of Wolf's fictionalising, and come to reflect his eventual recognition that fact and fiction must each be seen for its own reality, and must never be confused. Second, they provide the author with a valuable source of ironic comment, which gives an essential critical view of his central character. Third, they indicate the manner in which the best fiction can

itself contribute a great deal to the individual's apprehension of reality, provided that he fully recognises its relevance; fiction, like fact, can provide a genuine education only when the individual fully understands the true significance of both and the difference between them.

There are many more allusions in *Wolf Solent* than can be adequately discussed here. There are several allusions to *Macbeth*, for instance; most of them are ironically or comically inappropriate (though they do not amount to a *Macbeth* motif that is comparable to the *Hamlet* and *King Lear* motifs).²³ Some allusions provide little more than light comic touches, as, for example, when Mrs Torp talks in her own hilarious version of Biblical allusions.²⁴ Most of the allusions, however, serve principally to characterise Wolf's fictionalising and to reflect his general movement towards a greater sense of reality.²⁵ A comparison of two allusions to children's literature, one near the beginning of the novel and the other near the end, illustrates the general development well. When Wolf visits Selena Gault's house in Chapter 2, he is amused by Selena's cats, and thinks of *Puss in Boots*: "He felt as if he were in the house of the Marquis of Caracas and that the three cats were three Lord Chamberlains." (22) The allusion signifies no more than Wolf's childish fancy. In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Wolf calls on Christie, and finds that there is a doctor with her and that Malakite is dying. According to Christie, the old man has fallen down the stairs. The doctor leaves Wolf and Christie to watch over his unconscious body. Before long, Wolf is convinced that the old man is actually dead. Wolf continues to watch over Malakite's body as Christie goes to fetch the doctor. Suddenly one of Malakite's eyes opens, and he begins to speak. Wolf asks him whether he wants anything. Malakite's response is startling:

'She pushed me down,' said Mr. Malakite.

A preposterous nursery-rhyme about an old man 'who wouldn't say his prayers' came into Wolf's head. (603)

The allusion to *Goosey, goosey, gander*, however, unlike the earlier allusion to *Puss in Boots*, is far from preposterous. It has a sinister aptness. Wolf has long been afraid that Malakite's incestuous attentions will be turned towards Christie as they were earlier turned towards Christie's elder sister. Moreover, he has been afraid that his own physical rejection of Christie may have driven her to submit to the old man's lust. Anyone wandering "Upstairs and downstairs/And in my lady's chamber" may well have been able to see Malakite in Christie's bedroom. Malakite is irreligious ("an old man/That would not say his prayers"). Finally, Christie, eventually unable to stand being pestered, may very well have taken him "by the left leg" and thrown him "down the stairs".²⁶ Fiction, and absurd nursery fiction at that, has suddenly assumed the characteristic of terrifying fact. Wolf cannot fictionalise the reality in any other way than to think of a grimly appropriate rhyme that probably fits the facts in every detail.

The focus in this essay has been on the literary allusions, but it is worth remarking that the non-literary allusions also contribute an important part in reflecting Wolf's progress. In Chapter 5, for instance, mythical allusion is used to suggest that Wolf's courtship of Gerda is an aspect of the universal cycle of man's pursuit of woman. The rural setting takes on Arcadian characteristics, and Gerda seems to become some nymph or goddess of the woods. When Gerda runs away from Wolf she is compared to Atalanta, and when Wolf cannot find her he plays "with the fancy that, like another Daphne or Syrinx, his maid might have undergone some miraculous vegetable transmutation" (98). In Chapter 7, after their love-making in the cow-barn, Gerda whistles her blackbird song and Wolf has the feeling that they are taking their place in a succession of mythical lovers that has included Orion and Merope, and Deucalion and Pyrrha (163). The allusions are appropriate in two ways. First, they reinforce the sense of the pagan and earthy aspects of Gerda's beauty and

mystery. Second, they indicate the danger in which Wolf places himself by his romantic tendency to attribute mythical characteristics to a simple country girl, so that he too frequently fails to appreciate her ordinary character and needs.

There are also several allusions to painting, which, like many of the other allusions, indicate important character traits in Wolf. For instance, Wolf notices Urquhart's "Holbein-like countenance" (42); Gerda's sweetness makes Wolf see things through "a diffused golden light, like that of the pictures of Claude Lorraine" (71); Christie seems to Wolf an androgynous form from some "early Italian pictures" (80); Olwen's chatter is likened to "the swirl of a swollen brook in a picture of Nicolas Poussin" (127). Then there is the disapproval that Wolf expresses of an Alma Tadema, and of a Leighton (37) (which later becomes, presumably by an authorial slip, a Landseer) (46). Wolf clearly dislikes the moral tone of certain "mid-Victorian works of art", as much as he dislikes the portrait of Queen Victoria that hangs in the Three Peewits (69). But the most important painting in the novel is the one that comes to assume great symbolical significance for Wolf. In Urquhart's house there hangs a "monumental landscape" by Gainsborough, depicting "what might have been called the spiritual idea of a country road" (41). The painting, which is said to show "avenues of park-like trees and vistas of mysterious terrace-walks", cannot be identified with any single actual painting of Gainsborough's but is, rather, an abstraction from several paintings.²⁷ The country road is a common subject in Gainsborough's paintings, and, like that in the fictional Urquhart Gainsborough, the road usually leads to a distant horizon, suggesting intriguing possibilities of visual experience that are beyond the immediate scene. The painting eventually becomes, for Wolf, the representation of an ideal road, akin to his own life's course. Soon after his seeing the painting, the image of the road haunts him as he falls asleep: "The long,

enchanted road revealed in that Gainsborough picture hovered before him and beckoned him to follow it" (47). Much later, in a revelatory moment in the school classroom, an inkstain on the wall becomes transformed in his imagination into "a road like that road in the Gainsborough picture" (51). Later still, Wolf, in "a kind of waking trance", imagines a river, made of Christie's tears, replacing the road in the Gainsborough landscape (608). Finally, the recollection of the Gainsborough gives way to the abstracted image of the road, so that "all the years of his life" become for Wolf "dusty milestones along a dusty highway" (635), and in the closing paragraphs he determines to "follow his 'road', through the inkstains, and endure" (643). Wolf's gradual modification of the painting's meaning for him reflects his changing attitude to life and reality; from wistful romantic longings for the vaguenesses over the horizon he arrives at a tough and practical stoicism that brings him to terms with the immediate vulgarity of inkstains on a classroom wall.

It can be seen, then, that the allusions in *Wolf Solent* form a net of references to other artistic worlds, whose visions, sometimes contrasting and sometimes complementary, are brought to bear on Wolf's situation. From the mesh of visions Wolf eventually disentangles those philosophical elements that enable him to see things clearly as they really are. The ending of the novel shows that Wolf has come to a full realisation of far more than his solitude.²⁸ He has become independent not only of other people; more significantly, he has also become independent of the worse aspects of his fictionalising propensity, which previously acted as a romanticising screen between himself and the real world. The tough romantic vision of Wordsworth's *Intimations* ode is greatly different from Wolf's idle and dangerous dreams of some Imogen of the woods. The transition is finely worked for during the course of the novel, and Powys's allusiveness plays an indispensable part in the process.

Notes

¹Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, Oxford, 1973, p. 44.

²John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent*, London, 1929, p. 15. (Hereafter referred to as *WS*. Wherever possible in my text, single page references to this edition are made as numerals in parentheses.) Cf. *Cymbeline*, II.ii.37 (in the Alexander Text, from which all further references to Shakespeare are taken).

³*WS*, p. 57. Cf. *Eve of St. Agnes*, xxiv.

⁴*WS*, p. 112. Cf. *Paradise Lost*, II. 988.

⁵*WS*, p. 327. Cf. *Inferno*, iv. 106 ff.

⁶*WS*, p. 491. Cf. *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, II. xxiv.

⁷*WS*, p. 499. Cf. *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, IV. xxiv: when the dwarf vanishes he in fact calls out "Found! found! found!", and not, as Wolf supposes, "Lost! lost! lost!"

⁸*WS*, p. 384. Cf. *Isabella*, liii.

⁹*WS*, p. 385. Cf. *Hamlet*, I.v.162.

¹⁰*Isabella*, xlv (in Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Miriam Allott, London, 1970).

¹¹*WS*, p. 561. Cf. *Isabella*, l-li. Grotesquely, "so dear a head" is not from *Isabella* but from Shelley's *Adonais* (line 3), where the head is of course Keats's.

¹²*WS*, p. 328. Cf. *Hamlet*, I.v.150.

¹³*Hamlet*, II.ii.295.

¹⁴*WS*, p. 197. Cf. *Hamlet*, I.v..49 ff.

¹⁵*WS*, p. 318. Cf. *Hamlet*, III.ii.264.

¹⁶See *WS*, pp. 400, 410, 534, 551.

¹⁷*WS*, p. 619. Cf. *Hamlet*, V.ii.65.

¹⁸*WS*, p. 123. Cf. *King Lear*, I.iv.349.

¹⁹*WS*, p. 474. Cf. *King Lear*, V.iii.24. "Goujeres" is a spurious form introduced by Hanmer (1744); Powys was no doubt attracted by the strangeness of the word as well as by its alleged meaning ("pox").

²⁰*WS*, p. 576. Cf. *King Lear*, V.iii.317.

²¹*WS*, p. 637. Cf. *King Lear*, V.ii.11.

²²*King Lear*, V.ii.9.

²³See *WS*, pp. 83, 98, 258, 420, 521, 561, 570, 624.

²⁴See *WS*, p. 259. Cf. *WS*, pp. 343, 490, 491.

²⁵See *WS*, pp. 17, 28, 94, 95, 171, 298, 305, 315, 261.

²⁶"Goosey, goosey, gander", in *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, ed. Iona and Peter Opie, Oxford, 1951, p. 191.

²⁷Urquhart's "monumental landscape" probably derives most immediately from a fusion of "Gainsborough's Forest", which Powys would have seen in London at the National Gallery, and "Road Through Wood, with Boy Resting and Dog", which Powys would have seen in the Pennsylvania Museum while he was in Philadelphia, his "headquarters" after arriving in America (see *Autobiography*, London, 1934, pp. 301, 468). Many others of Gainsborough's paintings depict roads and lanes, often wooded, but they are all much smaller (under 25" x 30"), and can scarcely be called "monumental". See Ellis Waterhouse, *Gainsborough*, London, 1966, which contains a complete catalogue of known Gainsborough paintings.

²⁸But see Belinda Humfrey, "Introduction" in *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. Belinda Humfrey, Cardiff, 1972, p. 34.

John Cowper Powys

Wolf Solent: a letter from John Cowper Powys to his brother Llewelyn*

4 Patchin Place [New York]
Aug. 16 [1928]

Lulu my darlin,

Here I am laid up with a hurt shin . . . Schuster is persuading me in a manner which he courteously describes as "humble" to cut out 300 pages in the middle of my book where he thinks, and also Durant and also Mr. Fadiman, that I "haver" most—so now I have to write a rather difficult chapter to bridge over this gulf, retaining certain scenes that I regard as essential. Thus the book will be reduced to 200,000 words and I suppose two volumes of print of about 400 pages each. He speaks of the end of May as the date of publication. The title still remains undecided. Both Schuster and I would like to call it *The Quick and the Dead*, but that title has already been used . . . For myself I don't feel that this great cut is necessary at all. I only consent to it because I think Schuster is likely to do better for it than anyone else, especially as he is so keen on it. The chances are that no publisher would take it in its entirety. Probably Mr. Hill would have wanted it shortened too and it is very likely that his cut would have been on more structural lines because of

nervousness about "perversity" and "incest". These aspects of the book don't seem to worry Schuster at all . . . My own attitude is that the value of the particular 300 pages to be left out is almost as high or as low as any other pages! I regard the book as a sort of river . . . the waters of which you like to bathe in if you like that kind of water but which you leave, drawing up your canoe, at a great psychic curve of the stream where the "murmurs and scents" of the sea are most vivid . . . I can't tell whether I have the power or not for a world-shaking dramatic *dénouement* like the end of a Dostoievsky tale or a Shakespeare play—probably not—and the whole structure of this book is river-like and could go on or could stop, just as the *Iliad* needn't have ended with the death of Hector or the games in his honour, but might have gone on to the death of Achilles or at least to the Fall of Troy . . .

I confess I am faintly conscious now and then that with a terrific gathering up of my forces, the general situation of this book—centering round Urquhart's necrophilism and Wolf's "mythology"—might have been made to mount up and mount out and finally break in a great crashing catastrophic *King Lear*-like, *Possessed*-like finale with Urquhart's death taking place in some wild storm borne up on the wind, with whimperings of Valley and sardonic remarks of Jason, and Miss Gault ending tragically and Darnley separating from Mattie, and Wolf torn from both Gerda and Christie and tossed back miserably to London or committing suicide in Lenty Pond . . . I can vaguely visualize such a terrific world-shaking end, with fragments of pitiable issues tossed to and fro like leaves. I think it is not that I take my people not

*In 1972 the late Malcolm Elwin gave the editor a typescript copy of this letter, as it appears here in his edited form. The letter has only been published in an excellent French translation in *Granit*, 1/2, 1973, pp. 223-225. It will appear eventually in the second volume of Malcolm Elwin's edition of *John Cowper Powys's Letters to his Brother Llewelyn*, to be published by the Village Press. In the meantime, for various ingredients showing John Cowper Powys as an artist "in his own fashion", and for its relation to the gathering of critical interpretations of *Wolf Solent* in *The Powys Review*, this seems an appropriate time to set it in print.

seriously enough, but so seriously that I can't bring myself to sacrifice them in cold blood to an artistic finale, unless I were heroic enough to be prepared—if you catch my meaning—for such a suicide or for such a tragic end myself. I have a scruple about making my characters (for the sake of a dramatic role) go through what (D.V.) I trust I shall have cunning and luck enough to avoid myself! . . . You see, if the characters and events had run away with me and inevitably mounted up and mounted up to a great crashing finale around Urquhart's death over Redfern's body in some terrific storm, it wd. very likely have been a greater book than this one is. But if in cold blood for the sake of "tragic drama" I deliberately suppressed my personal cowardice and shrinking from violence and "sacrificed" Miss Gault, Urquhart, Wolf himself, Gerda, Darnley too, in a crescendo of pity and a dark-whirling rounded off *dénouement*, it is quite on the cards that it might have been far less massive and satisfying (to Hell with "convincing") than it is now, even with the present close in a quiet minor key! By letting Carfax substitute himself for Wolf at the end like a rich-fleeced sly old Scapegoat and letting his very disillusioned view

of Urquhart's mania prevail over Wolf's piled up edifice of supernatural Good and Evil, I have avoided the danger of any forced catastrophe or sham theatrical thunder at the close . . . And tho' this is a quiet close and not so great a work of art as if a real terrific catastrophe had grouped tragic figures in a common doom about Lenty Pond and Redfern's grave, it is better than a forced *dénouement* that would throw a "suspicion" as you say backwards over the whole book. Now as it is, Lenty Pond and Redfern's grave sink into wraith-like floating clouds in a low horizon as largely the product of Wolf's imagination—who now has to deal with things on a more earthy and less supernatural stage! Both Carfax and Jason being in one sense justified against his mystic fancies—and yet in that Golden Saturnalian meadow at the close of something (& can I make it clearer exactly what? I must try again at that) emerges to help him cope with things, even on a more earthy basis, in his own fashion with his assurance still held that the material world is not all there is, even tho' the great struggle between Good and Evil has somewhat petered out or at least proved more involved than he thought! . . .

Sylvia Townsend Warner

East Chaldon and T. F. Powys*

Since my narrative** has now brought me to stay in Theo's house it seems proper that I should give a description of it. As the Gothic Cathedral is the expression in stone of the mysticism of the middle ages, as the cobb cottages in Chaldon village are the expression in mud of the domesticity of the peasant, so Theo's house is the expression in brick of the respectability of the later Victorian middle-classes. The Gothic cathedral is like the largest possible cage

*Composed in about 1930, this is a late and narrative section from a lengthy typescript/manuscript about T. F. Powys made over several years. From the same typescript we published an earlier narrative section in *The Powys Review*, Number Five, under our own title: "Theodore Powys and Some Friends at East Chaldon, 1922-1927". An intermediate and a very late part from the typescript were published in *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*, Peter Owen, 1980, as it was clearly from these parts that Sylvia Townsend Warner was taking extracts for a contribution to the *Recollections* at the time of her death early in 1978. All these sections therefore have been published from what was clearly an original and first draft copy, never corrected by their author. Sylvia Townsend Warner did herself extract some passages from her long narrative for publication, and she reshaped them slightly and made minor alterations to them throughout. These, relating incidents in 1923 and 1927, were published in *A Chatto and Windus Miscellany*, 1928 (pp. 55-62), entitled "Two Extracts from a Study of Theodore Powys", with the information that they came from "*Animae Effigies*" in preparation. The passages used for the *Miscellany* have been omitted from the publication of Sylvia Townsend Warner's rendering of T. F. Powys in both the *Recollections* and the *Review*: with them the publication of Sylvia Townsend Warner's whole typescript on T. F. Powys is now virtually complete.

**Sylvia Townsend Warner went to stay with T. F. Powys in November of 1929 or 1930. The brief narrative of her arrival at Beth Car and of some night-time walks on the adjacent downs with Powys, a narrative which has a different focus and tone from the essay here, is published in *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*, pp. 131-132.

woven in stone osiers by the logic of the schoolmen to contain that queer bird, God. The cobb cottages are like swallow's nests with copper in them. But Theo's house belongs to the type of architecture which is neither theoretical or practical. It is necessitarian. Compared to it Crabbe would seem like Shelley. By this I do not mean that it lacks ornament or amenity. On the contrary, it has a bow-window, and the blank side that faces the road is trimmed with a stripe of pale buff ornamental bricks. But these are purely necessitarian in spirit, for it is necessary for the parlour to exhibit some mark of class-consciousness and it is also necessary for blank surfaces to be trimmed. For a long time I chose to believe that it had been built by a station-master as a private residence for his retiring age, and I daresay this notion was strengthened by the fact that it is built of the same very hard red bricks that signal boxes are built of, but now I have come to disassociate it with any human desires, and to think of it as having been dropped from above like some rectangular meteorite upon the slope of the green down.

This arbitrary look it has is emphasised by the fact that it is not tethered to the ground by any scheme of gardening. In the *Soliloquies* Theo represents himself as a modest Dioclesian, walking among large but mild cabbages, and repairing his fence with string. At one time I believe he tilled his half-acre very diligently, and certainly he grew onions, for Violet tells how he planted them under the weeping ash "to give it something to weep for". But though Theo is strongly built he is not strong; and gardening is fatiguing work, and in the neighbourhood of rabbits, disheartening. Moreover the desire to write became more

insistent, and the hand that has once learnt to hold a pen to some purpose soon loses its knack for any other tool. So the cabbages, being cut, were left to burn themselves out in seventy-branched candle-sticks of flowering shoots, the weeping ash but wept over a memory, and soon only the greenness and the unusually vegetable look of the grass told that the soil it grew in had once been laboured by the spade.

But there are always compensations in this world which is so nicely balanced in space. As Theo himself pointed out when, feeling that as a host he should make conversation, he remarked to a young London barrister: "This has been a bad year for thistles, but a good year for nettles". Similarly as it lapsed from being a good garden for vegetables, so in exact ratio did Theo's half-acre become a good garden for fowls. Free to scratch and ramble where they list, a dozen hens, various in breed but alike in happy confidence, together with a pair of India runner ducks who were won in a raffle at the Winfrith bazaar, wander amongst the undergrowth of what, if I were lowland Scots, I should call Theo's hen-park. At one time this troop was augmented by some blue rabbits, and the latest recruit is a gosling called Tommy, because a little girl in the village said to Violet: "I am sure that your goose is a tom-goose." Besides these there are of course the cats, a rather fluctuating tribe whose head-quarters is the coach-house. But I do not see much of the cats, for on my visits to Theo I am accompanied by a chow who holds the same views about cats that large-hearted country gentlemen hold about foxes: that they enjoy being chased.

Other features in this garden are a bush of sweet briar, three poll apple-trees that look not unlike birds-nests, a land pump whose air of being a widower may have aroused compassionate feelings in the lilac-bush and the elder-bush that every year push their green petticoats more closely around his leg, and a bleached and rickety bench where on the first fine mornings of the year Theo likes to sit sunning himself, at the same time keeping a wary look-out

for queen wasps. But in my haste to describe the garden I have omitted to enter it . . . I have said no word of the white gate.

In order to approach the white gate properly I must walk the reader up the lane from the village.

The village of Chaldon Herring, as it is properly called in the Ordnance map though the postal name is East Chaldon, lies at the western end of a stretch of water meadows. The road from Winfrith skirts these water-meadows, and though there is a short cut across two hay-fields belonging to Farmer Child, it is best on a visit of ceremonious inspection to keep to the Winfrith road and enter the village by the approach of state which leads one directly to the village green and the post-office. Should the time be early afternoon the Royal Mail may be observed waiting courteously at the corner of the green. When I first visited Chaldon the Royal Mail functioned in a very nondescript manner by means of a push bicycle; two or three years ago this was ennobled into a motor bicycle with a large scarlet box attached to one side of it; but now His Majesty's Government appears in the form of a van, nothing less, and this crescendo of magnificence I attribute entirely to Theo's correspondence with his publishers.

Crossing the Winfrith road is a lesser road, which to the south soon turns into a track over the downs, in winter a muddy and in summer a dusty one. The poor estate of this bit of road is probably due to the fact that it passes Billy Lucas's cottage, for no road could listen to Billy Lucas's language without losing its self-respect. North of the green however, this road plucks up heart, and having been comforted on the right hand by the Methodist chapel and on the left by the Inn, is given a new name like other redeemed creatures, and under the title of the Drove climbs the Five Maries and goes down into the Dorchester road.

The sign-board of the Inn bears the inscription: The Sailors Return. It was here that Mr William Target lived with his Tulip, though, I am sorry to say, since his

day the liquor is by no means what it was, indeed on two occasions I have gone there to buy a bottle of Old London Gin and found no gin at all of any description . . . a sad blow on a dark winter's night when one has got to pass the churchyard. It will be seen that the name of the Inn as given by the sign-board is susceptible of two interpretations. The reading chosen by David Garnett, who supplies a possessive comma, has no doubt much probability to commend it. It is also supported by parallel instances; The Peter's Finger, The King's Head, The Cyclist's Rest. Nevertheless I should feel myself lacking in open-mindedness if I omitted to point out that the name of the Chaldon Inn can equally well be read as an exclamation: The Sailors Return! On moral grounds there is a great deal to be said for this reading; for it is obvious that several sailors would need more liquor than one sailor, and probably a great deal more liquor, since what with calling of toasts, looking towards each other, remembering absent friends (sailors have proverbially a number of these), sconsing, the good of the house, to our next merry meeting and other tospot expedients, not to mention the natural emulation of congregational drinking, the sum of what several sailors would drink could not be computed by the ordinary arithmetic of "If one sailor can drink three pints and a half how much will two sailors drink? Answer: seven pints," but must be arrived at by a method of reckoning based upon compound interest, geometrical progression and the differential calculus. This being granted me, and I do not see how it can be denied, I consider it inherently more probable that the name of an inn should commemorate or invoke the return of several sailors rather than of one sailor who might not even be a two-legged one. Moreover, in dealing with any manuscript text, it is essential to consider it by the light of paleography. The sign-board of The Sailors Return is no less a manuscript because it happens to be written in painting; but the use of this medium may, in no ordinary sense, be called a determining factor in the choice between a

possessive or an exclamatory interpretation. It is the common experience of those who have had anything to do with paint that the supply is never quite equal to the demand. Much the same thing of course may be said of ink or any other writing fluid; but whereas in the case of ink it is an easy matter to step down to the shop and obtain more, in the case of paint it is by no means so simple, indeed in a secluded hamlet like Chaldon Herring we may reasonably assume that to do so would be out of the question. A conscientious sign-painter with a motor bicycle might go to Dorchester to replenish, but the sign of The Sailors Return cannot be less than twenty years old, and may well incorporate a much earlier text being in fact a mere rifacimento, or one of a series of rifacimenti of the original inscription contemporary with the establishment of the house; and however highly we may rate the conscientiousness of the old-time craftsman it is going too far to expect him to walk all the way to Dorchester and back for a lick of paint. Having thus established, as I hope I have done, that the ambiguity of the text arises from a deficiency of the medium employed, the next and last step in my argument is simple. In all European countries it is the custom to inscribe from left to right, and to proceed from letter to letter in a regular and uninterrupted sinister direction. In a rapid cursive hand perhaps, the pen may return to cross the T and to dot the I; but in such an inscription as that which we have been considering each letter would be formed separately, and completed before the next following was begun. Which then, is the more likely hypothesis: that, the paint running out, a penultimate comma or a final mark of exclamation should be lacking? To my mind, and I have been considering this problem on and off for years, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the exclamatory reading. Not that I bear Professor Garnett, F.R.Z.S. any enmity for preferring the other reading. I am sure that he did not adopt it without proper deliberation. No. I could have wished that

he had recognised the existence of an alternative theory in a foot-note; that is all.

But perhaps I have lingered overlong at the Inn. We have yet to pass the Churchyard, and to any mind tempered to country delights and in a fit frame to be let up to Theo's gate, a Churchyard is as good a spot as the other to dawdle in, and to learn something of one's neighbours. Besides, at the hour that I have in mind the Inn is closed.

Leaving the green the Winfrith road turns a little to the left, and begins to go uphill into a darkness of trees. It narrows, too, like Hamilton Place, and like Hamilton Place its natural sombreness receives a deeper tinge, a moral tinge, cast by the dwelling-places of the select and splendid. For here are the everlasting habitations of Mr Child and Mr Todd, farmers of Chaldon. Mr Child's gate is always wide-open; and this is just as it should be, for so is Mr Child's mouth: open in loud confidential boasting; so are Mr Child's ears, for any and every scandal, either of the village or of the universe; so are Mr Child's eyes, so that he may spy one from afar, observe one's scandalous doings or, should one not be doing anything scandalous at the moment, pounce down upon one and begin to talk. Mr Child's conversation is slow and relentless, like droppings of strong glue. In the sight of God Mr Child's soul must be as the soul of a new-born child; for only an innocent mind could take such an interest in the sins of the flesh.

A sure way to win a woman's love is to be at her mercy, and for this reason I have a soft spot for Mr Child. One morning as he was out shooting rabbits with his two black spaniels at his heels I happened by some odd chance to spy him before he spied me. He shot at a rabbit, but missed it. Turning to look for another rabbit he saw me, standing stock-still in the road with an air of attention that may have seemed to him satirical, for he called to his dogs and set off up the hillside in a purposeful manner. Presently he stooped and picked up an old furze-stump. Then he cursed the dogs.

Mr Todd's gate is of iron, and usually

shut. A low retaining wall prevents the Churchyard earth from tumbling into Mr Todd's garden, but any misanthropical bones that did chance to burrow their way there would find Mr Todd's garden infinitely more congenial. No beam of a living sun could elude the dark pressure of Mr Todd's trees to mock them with warmth and spangles, no weed growing in shriven mould is of so charnel a green, is of so despairing a profusion as Mr Todd's hemlock, and though the voices of children might still be heard admiring the nosegays in the memorial jam-pots or calling I spy among the headstones, the bones need fear nothing, for no children play in Mr Todd's garden. The bones need not even dread the advent of a monkey, for solitary as an old black eunuch with rheumatism among the dank growth of alder and sycamore stands an inexpressibly melancholy monkey-puzzler.

At this point the road becomes extremely dark, and here, one on either hand are the Vicarage and the Churchyard, like Sin and Death. Sin is far the worse of the two. Sin is large and gaunt, it is built of pale bricks, it is roofed with sad slate, it has lean Gothic gables and hungry windows, on its forehead is a birthmark like the brand of Cain, and inside it is full of pitchpine and destruction. The people who live too long in it go mad. Sin is ghastly at all times and seasons; as a bulk in the darkness, as a pallor by moonlight at which time its birthmark shows most and shows most terribly, as a shadow behind a shifting curtain of rain on a winter day, as a pale cheat on a summer afternoon, as a hollow trap in the spring sunlight. Theo believes, and I think he is right, that Sin is the habitation of a Demon, or as some say, an Elemental.

It would be difficult to walk with any courage past Sin if one were not able to turn one's eyes toward what stands over against it with the reflection that Death came into the World to save sinners. Death lies high above the road, which here runs along the side of a slope, and is approached by a flight of wide stone steps. These steps are worn into dipping curves so that it is a

pleasure to go up and down them. They are worn, not by the tread of the coffin-bearers, nor the due feet of the clergymen, nor the Sunday soles of Mrs Todd and Mrs Child, but by the feet of children; for they lead, not only to Death, but also to the village school, a dejected, religious-looking building whose drains are said to be out of order.

Death is entered by a squeaky gate: officially entered, that is, for there is no reason why one should not leap in over the wall, as I suppose suicides do. It is very grassy, and the grass is very green because there are trees all around it, except at the north-east corner, where one can look out and see how Mr Todd's turnips are getting on. From this corner too one can look across Death into a narrow view of the road leading up to the Five Maries; and as I still love the world, and also as I am extremely fond of cow-parsley, which is allowed to grow here in great peace and beauty since it covers only the graves of suicides and babies, this is the resting-place I choose out for myself when Theo and I walk round Death playing at the game of disposing of our remains. From this corner too, I shall have a fine prospect of the Resurrection, when I hope to satisfy my curiosity about a number of people who are as yet but names to me. But to choose the site for a house is not more ticklish work than choosing the site for a grave, and much as I like the north-east corner I am sensible that there are several things to be said against it. The weightiest of these objections is, that, unless he should take a mind to stroll round the corner and look at the turnips, I shall not see the Resurrection of the Reverend Joseph Cope.

For this, as for so many other things, the Church may be held to blame; not, however, in this case the whole estate of the Church militant here upon earth but the small stone building with a squat tower which is its outward and visible sign to the parish of Chaldon Herring.

I make no apology for not having mentioned the Church before in this account of Death. I am only following the local use, a

use perfectly consistent with the country frame of mind. To the villagers of Chaldon Herring, and to any normal villagers, the Church is a building in the Churchyard. In winter, if it be nicely heated, it is a place where one may sit warm without the trouble of mending the fire. At Easter it is a place that smells of damp moss and primroses, a copse where a modest girl can sit beside her young man without any danger of her new dress getting rumpled or stained green, and where ants will not crawl up her legs. In the season of harvest it is a place where a farmer that is a churchwarden can contemplate in a mystical way not possible out-of-doors the colour of his wheat or the fulness of his roots. To the labouring man the Church is a place where he can wear his Sunday trousers and where his wife must leave off talking. To the married woman it is a place where her children are not likely to cry. To the aged it is a place where they can feel at home because they have been there so many times before. To children it is a place where the clergyman's boots may squeak, where a bird may perch on the collecting box or where Theo may turn over two pages at once. It is all things to all men, a table where all may feed according to their desires, the house of a God who provides crumbs for the sparrow and blood for the eagle and grass for the lamb and lamb for the nursery dinner. To Mrs Vesper it is a place where the robe of the woman of Samaria in the stained glass window is the colour of tinned salmon, and to Mr Samways the sexton it is a tomb, larger than any altar tomb in Death, but not so permanent.

Permanence is what matters.

Gilding fades fast
Pigskin will last.

And however long the sermon may be, and however secure one's title to a pew, the Church is but another kind of alehouse which, come closing time, must tip out the congregation with a civil word of blessing. Then, just as they loiter outside The Sailors Return even though it be raining or the

wind blow cold, the village people loiter in Death, fingering the bushes or perusing over the grass to the latest grave, to see if the flowers have been renewed in the jam-pot. But they do not look back to the Church as they look back to the Inn: it is the graves they look at. Permanence is what matters. One may visit the building in the middle of the churchyard in a friendly way, but when all is said and done it is a tied house, a tied house belonging to a firm which has endured for such a very long time that one may without impropriety describe it as immortal; and the notices in the porch, about Parish Rates, Taxes on Men-servants, and Swine Fever, though interesting reading, are austere reminders that although it may offer to its congregation a refuge from the cares and obligations of this world, that refuge is only a temporary one. Permanence is what matters, and this the people of Chaldon Herring know well, looking at the graves with respect, as they look at the freehold cottage up the Drove, and reading those notices which announce to all and sundry that this and that happy land-owner has paid his quittance fee, and come to the churchyard to stay. Permanence is what matters. Even the Reverend Joseph Cope, Vicar of Chaldon Herring for seventeen years, decided in the end for a securer tenure, and settled himself down in Death.

There is no cleric (except Dr Primrose and the Reverend Samuel Woodford) for whom I feel a livelier affection and esteem than the Reverend Joseph Cope. Every trait of his character that is told me deepens my conviction that he was everything that a country clergyman should be. He loved his flock, for to this day the soup which was given away at his back-door is held in loving remembrance. He loved their green pastures and their fold, chosing it to be his resting place for ever, and he loved their lambs; for Violet has told me how he used to lead the children in processions, in processions with singing and a banner, about the church; though when I consider the size of the church I cannot well see where there was space for the procession to

proceed, unless he led it round and round the font. Even Sin appears to me less gloomy and forbidding if I reflect how long he lived in it, waking morning after morning to pleasant thoughts of marmalade and the barometer, perhaps a barometer of the kind which is enriched with copper-plate observations entitled "Admiral Fox's Special Remarks on Falling". Time in a country parsonage should offer a prospect as handsome and spacious as does a gentleman's park, a prospect where duties may be approached by winding walks or shady alleys, and where cares may lie down under ornamental trees. And on a morning when the windows are silky with rain and the gutters chirp contentedly, how delightful to pull a leather arm-chair to the fire and read all over again how Mr Sponge drove in an omnibus up the Edgeware Road to buy "a long, low, clean-headed, clean-necked, big-hocked chestnut, with a long tail, and great, large, flat, white legs, without a mark or blemish upon them"!

"Still, Parvo had his foibles"; and it is a grief to me that Theo does not see eye to eye with me in this matter of the Reverend Joseph Cope. Not that he has anything to say against the man, insinuations against his soup or his doctrine, or what not. But I am conscious of a slight autumnal nip in the quality of Theo's silence when I expatiate upon this theme—a mental reservation, a reluctance to abet my liking. Perhaps it may be due to jealousy, for Theo, like God, like all affectionate characters, is subject to that failing. Perhaps he feels a little hurt that I should go a-whoring after strange parsons when he has created so many that I might stay at home with: Mr Hayball, Mr Summerbee, Mr Dottery, who stood sponsor to a pig called Adelaide, Mr Herrick whose cure was in dull Devonshire, Mr Grobe, or dear Mr Thomas Tucker; or maybe he has lent too credulous an ear to certain tales current in the village, tales of a black dog which haunts the lane between Sin and Death, tales even of a clerical form which may be seen to open the vicarage gate

and hurry across the lane into the churchyard in pursuit of a maidservant, whose white apron glimmers in the dusk. Hoping that I might tempt these scruples of Theo's a little further into the open, I wrote him a rather cunningly-devised letter—at least I thought it such—in which the subject of clergymen in general was led up to by some observations on Isaac Watts, a poet rightly admired by Theo; then, as in some carvings of the middle-ages where the souls of the devout are shown as small as kittens sheltering under the folds of their patron's robe, the Reverend Joseph Cope was smuggled into the last sentence under the hem of Isaac's black silk gown. Whether my stratagem was successful or whether, pitying my artifice, he was moved to indulge me I do not know; but Theo's reply mentioned the Reverend Joseph in these terms:

Mr Cope died at East Chaldon. There was great excitement. Two or three carriages with pairs of horses attached to each came with grand doctors. And after that was over, all the choir-men, choir-boys and choir-girls stood in rows to do respect to the body of the old rascal. But he was rich, or his wife was. Doris—(it was Doris who felt so sure about the Tom-Goose)—will show to you a hole, you can put your arm into it, under his stone, through which Mr Cope creeps out at night to scare the solitary wayfarer.

Now this is typical of Theo's grudging spirit towards Mr Cope. Not that I make any demur to the expression "old rascal", for in Theo's vocabulary "old rascal" is a term of endearment, indeed I would hail it as a sign of grace if I did not feel so sure that it was put there to complete the cadence; but I do rear against that allusion to Mr Cope's riches, made even more insulting by the implied indifference as to whether they were not really Mrs Cope's; for from just such a remark, slipped out just so, an unthinking hearer might go on to suppose that the soup was only rich because Mr (or Mrs) Cope could afford to plunge whole legs of veal into it, though of course no judicious mind would be thus misled for an instant,

knowing full well that it is exactly in the houses of the very rich that one may expect to find nothing to drink at lunch but barley-water, and that the soup (if any) will have been extorted from lentils.

As for the hole in the stone, that is no news to me. I have been familiar with it for years, I have even put my hand through it. Nothing happened, I need hardly say: no cold breath moved, no unstable teeth chattered on my wrist. If Theo were looking over me as I write I suppose he would continue his work of misrepresentation by suggesting that nothing happened because Mr Cope chanced, just then, to be out. But I will not have my dog given a bad name, much as I love Theo, in this matter he shall not sway me. And even supposing that there be some truth in that village story (though personally I consider it a baseless canard), is it not susceptible of a creditable explanation; for what could be more natural, more likely, than that a worthy person, reposing at his ease with leisure to bethink him of things past, should remember that he had not finished hearing the girl her Catechism?

But though Theo shall not win me over to his way of thinking, neither can I win him over to mine; and the best I can hope is that he will be reconciled to Mr Cope in Death. He will have every opportunity to be so; for when we play at the game of Disposing of Our Remains, Theo, after lingering for an approving-while in my south-east corner, leads me to approve his choice; and indeed, I do think it an admirable one, and none the worse for being in Mr Cope's neighbourhood, though I am too tactful to speak of that. Besides Mr Cope, Theo will have for a neighbour that girl—wise, I think; sad, I fancy, though whether from love's excess or love's deficit there can be now no knowing; perhaps her trouble was not love at all—whose stone, though she died at 24, is one of the oldest in Death, and whose epitaph Theo quoted in *Innocent Birds*:

How strangely fond of life Poor mortels
be.

How few who see my bead would change
with me.

Then searious Reader tel me which is best.
The toilsom Journey or the Travlers Reast.

Hereby, just on the boundary of Mr Tod's front dingle, grows a noble chestnut-tree; and under the chestnut-tree is an ilex, a tree of wintry shade; and under the ilex is a large and dense bush of privet whose branches rest on the ground. Theo must always have had an eye for cover: when he was a small boy he dug himself a hiding-hole in the hard damp earth under the laurels of a shrubbery, a hole so roomy that he could get right into it; and this eye for cover has doubtless been sharpened by living in a landscape where anything moving upon the smooth downs is singularly exposed to discovery, so much exposed indeed, that on one occasion at least he was compelled, not wanting to go for a walk with a lady, to conceal himself inside a rick. However, her dogs soon nosed him out, and he had to step forth, pretending that there is nothing very unusual in being covered with straws. So I can well understand his tenderness for that privet-bush: "For when I am dead I shall not wish to be disturbed, Sylvia. I wish to be out of the way. Job said: O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave. But it is best to be on the safe side, and to hide the grave too."

It is growing dark, and perhaps I have stayed too long in Death, forgetting that we are bound for the white gate. After passing Sin and Death the mounting road leaves the trees behind. The air seems to grow lighter and more living; along the grass bank columbines grow under the brambles, and on the right hand, only a very rickety fence divides the road from a green field sloping down to the stream whose higher reaches so much resemble Venice. Here we can look up the valley, observing how beautiful the contours of High Chaldon are, seen thus close; or one can look back at the village, the roofs in a loose flock, like sheep feeding, under the wavy line of the Five Maries. It is just here, walking up from the village with Theo in a November dusk, and

perhaps carrying the afternoon milk, that I am apt to remember the sea, little more than a mile away, but hidden behind the tall downs. And it will suddenly become very real to me: I shall hear the slow speech of the waves locked in a winter calm; a reserved, whispering voice; as though I had come to the edge of the cliff, I shall feel the authentic stab of surprise, almost of terror, with which one realises, as though one were perceiving the true stature of an enemy, how far up the sky is the line of the sea. But mixed in my mind with thoughts of the sea, and with thoughts of Theo's house, waiting just round the corner, is a last backward glance of affection for the Reverend Joseph Cope. Now is the moment—for I don't suppose that I shall mention him again—to reveal my key reason for cherishing his memory as I do. If Mr Cope had not lived at Chalton Herring Theo might not be here at all: he certainly would not be in his present residence. For Theo's house was built at Mr Cope's command, some say for a curate; others, for a gardener; on this nice point I cannot pretend to an opinion. Perhaps it is a little grand for a curate, but equally one might advance that it is too grand for a gardener. Thomas Hardy's brother, who was the architect, placed in the centre of the north wall a terra-cotta plaque representing pomegranates in bas-relief, and this might be intended as an incentive to a gardener, reminding him to be a profitable labourer in his master's strawberry beds. Pomegranates, though, are a religious variety of fruit, and equally applicable to a curate. They are also the symbol of fertility; but I don't think we need linger over this aspect of pomegranates, for I am confident that Thomas Hardy's brother intended no insinuations of this sort—one has only to look at the house as a whole to realise that here we have the expression of a mind unbending to mystical innuendo. Indeed I think we should be very guarded in attaching any significance beyond what is purely structural to these pomegranates. The north wall is a blank wall, but as the house is set sideways to the road, it is also in

a sense a façade, and to an architect, mentally stepping a little back from his creation, it might naturally occur that such a wall needed trimming, needed something to collect and steady the eye; and then he would add the pomegranates, very possibly a stock pattern.

Whether the house was intended for curate or gardener neither curate or gardener possessed it. Indeed I believe I am right in saying that neither curate or gardener has ever spent a night under its roof. Mr Cope died while the house was yet a-building and for some time it stood unfinished and abandoned, like Baalbec, or the Hyde Park Hotel, and became an habitation for foxes, which are very plentiful on Chaldon Down, and a dumping-ground for Mr Tod's sacks of kainite. Lovers would climb in by the window on foggy afternoons, and the school children would dare each other to go up and knock on the door, braving the ghost, the melancholy ghost who lives in all empty houses. Theo and Violet, might walk by too—for at this time Theo had come to Chaldon Herring and met Violet—shaking their heads over such a waste of good bricks and mortar. Perhaps Violet may have had her eye on it even then, at any rate I expect she allowed her fancy to walk in and inspect the pantry shelves and the copper, for no young woman worth her salt who is going to get married can pass any empty house without picturing how the clock would look on the mantle-piece. She may even have given her fancy leave to speak, and then Theo would observe discreetly that new houses are sometimes apt to be a little damp.

Any such dampness was avoided by the simple expedient of not being the first tenant. Theo's warming-pan was a retired rate-collector from Dorchester, and when this good gentleman had fulfilled his office and taken his rheumatism to Swanage, Theo bought the lease and moved in. The first pleasant repose of ownership was rudely disturbed one day when two perfect strangers walked with an order to view.

"I welcomed them as best I could, my dear, in a modest way. I apologised for not

being able to offer them any gin, as they had come rather unexpectedly. It is always best to be polite, and for all I knew it might have been their house. I certainly did think it was mine. But one does sometimes make mistakes, you know. At least I do. I daresay *you* would never be mistaken in a house, you would know the law. But I was firm with them, all the same. I knocked out my pipe on their grate."

A letter to the solicitor (I wish I could have seen that letter) cleared the matter up, and Theo was able to go on painting the gate with a quiet mind.

This gate is a solid five-barred affair, plain, but well-made. It compares to an ordinary field gate as a bailiff compares to a tenant farmer. It is well-hung, and does not squeak. A noose of string hangs on one gate-post, and every night the gate is tethered to the post by means of this noose. Not that Theo supposes that this impediment would thwart any really determined burglar; but his insight into our mortal inconsistencies leads him to suppose (I think rightly) that though the burglar would un-noose the gate on entering he would forget in the flurry of crime, to noose it up again on leaving; consequently, should Theo find one morning that the hens were gone and the gate ungartered, he would know that a fellow-creature, and not a fox or a badger, had done the deed, or that whoever had taken the hens was a mean, sneaking fellow, who preferred to come in through a hole in the fence.

On the top rail of the gate is painted in black letters

BETH CAR.

Well-informed visitors who come to inspect Powys as a rarity, and can put two and two together, read these words, and instantly think of Bethgeiert. Such cultured minds as these know that Powys is the name of a Welsh family, they will even remember that in the middle ages a large district in Wales was called Powys; they find no difficulty in reading on Theo's gate a pious allusion to the cradle of his race.

As it happens, Beth Car is a Hebrew name, meaning: A house or place of



pasture. As Theo's house stands in the midst of fields, he thought this a very proper name for it. He found it in the bible, in the First Book of Samuel, the Seventh Chapter, and the Eleventh Verse.

"And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them: and they were smitten before Israel.

And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines and smote them, until they came under Beth-Car.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

Theo knows this countryside like an old dog fox. Of all the field gates he has opened for me I have never known him err as to which end had the fastening. Every gap in a hedge, every breach in a wall, every sagging strand in a barbed wire fence is stored in his memory, for each is a possible bolt-hole which may at some time be needed to assist his retirement from some intruder on his solitary walks, a bull or a bishop, or some

fellow out rabbiting who might talk of the weather. From whatever quarter the winter winds may blow, he will lay his course along some valley where the bleached grasses scarcely stir on the bank. On a spring afternoon he knows to a minute at what hour an ashtree will throw the prettiest shade, and on the way thither he will forewarn one of the nettles. And however bare and bleak the down from which one sees the storm cloud hurried on by the March gale, he will have led one to a hay-stack or a bramble-thatch before the first volley of sleet rattles on the windward side of the shelter. Long knowing this, my trust in Theo's guidance was complete and entire. Yet a time came when that trust was to waver, and that wavering to be proved a blasphemy. It was a November afternoon when he took us over West Chaldon Down to overlook the valley of Mockery Gap. The air was mild, and to the south-west a vast cloud was sucking up the sunset, and we stood for a long while watching the dusk grow in the valley. In that dusk the Mockery wood seemed to enlarge itself, and as the light went from the sea, movement went with it, till it lay heavy and glum as a leaden shield. As we turned back along the coastguard's path the darkness of the cloud came after us, and overtook us. For a while there was still a glimmer of broken chalk at the cliffs edge, but presently even that was gone, and we were walking by foot-feel alone. As a rule the coming of darkness is to some extent balanced by the increase of cats-sight, but this was a night when even a cat would have stretched her pupils in vain. It was the thick darkness that rested on the land of Egypt. While we kept to the coastguard's path, with Theo's footsteps going in front of us we were well enough, but in order to reach home by the route he had appointed; it would be necessary to turn off, and traverse quarter of a mile or so of bramble patch and waste ground and so strike into the track which leads down into Rat's Valley. In my mind's eye I had a fair picture of the terrain, I also had lively recollections of how scratched and shaken I had been in crossing the bramble tract once before. But when Theo, speaking out of the darkness,

remarked that there was a little patch through the brambles, used by him and a few rabbits, which he thought he could lay hold on, I lost my faith, and began to murmur. Theo kept on. At first I thought that he would never know where to turn off into his rabbit-path, then I began to feel sure that we must have passed it, for we seemed to have been walking for ever through the dark air, our feet shuffling on the beaten turf. Then, when I had lost interest in my fate, and was prepared to walk on until we came to Lulworth, or fell into the sea, I heard his feet hesitate, and his stick probe the tangle of briars and grasses for a moment or two. Then he put out his hand, took hold of me, and drew me into the path. My feet told me that I should have been hard put to it to find it by day.

We were too much awed to comment, and Theo took his achievement too much as a matter of course to say more than that in about five minutes time we should be passing some hurdled sheep; my graceless murmurings, though, were not to be taken as a matter of course and he must have decided that a little magnanimity would not be amiss; for when we were on the cart-track, and our heels striking sparks from the flints, he politely requested me to take the lead. At the end of this visit one thing was certain—that I should pay another. My presence had pleased; and so had my absences. "Sylvia is such a pleasant visitor," remarked Violet at a later date in our acquaintance. "She likes to go for walks alone, and she is out just as long when it rains." It was the wife that spoke, not the hostess and in her mind's eye as she spoke was, I know, a picture of the sitting-room, with the fire burning in the swept hearth, and the ink-pot on the table reflecting its merry leapings. "In the morning my father goes into his room, and shuts the door after him. He writes for quarter of an hour, and then he reads the Bible." This filial lampoon remains with me, not for its accuracy of statement—though Theo undoubtedly does read the Bible, as Herrick read his Saint Ben—but for its overtones. Thus one might say, In the morning the sun rises. So

regular a disposition of time, an economy so sober steadfast and demure, was not to be impiously upset. The sitting-room door once closed, whether Theo attended to his own works or cast his eye over those of another author, there was no room for young women from London behind it.

Yet though I walked alone, I could carry Theo with me, and as I went up through the silent fields his soft grave utterance dwelt in my ears. For in his household, where all things have their appointed time, there is ample leisure to sit over the coffee-cups and with the excuse of an apple or tobacco, lengthen out talk into conversation. The morning, when other people are safely engaged in making the world go round, is a good time for conversation: there is little risk that one will be discovered at one's discreditable occupation, the day is before one, yet it has already been civilized with a meal. True, there have been incursions, even at this hour; once, shot from his orbit by some convulsion of nature, the rate-collector called at 10.15 so that our speech suddenly took on the alertness of a French grammar: "Here is the rate-collector. Where is the pen?"—and again, after a lapse of some years, the oil-man came after breakfast instead of coming in the afternoon. But even these, once one has got used to them, can be turned into a well (ports and happy havens); the rate collector, I remember, led Theo into some ingenious speculations as to whether a rate collector who had come a long way, and not been let in, might forge the receipt rather than pass that dog again, and the oilman, having admitted that he could not always be sure of orders booked a month ago, was inveigled into a discussion of the nature of Time. At least, I presume he was; of a certainty I only know that Theo re-entered the room with the words: "That young gentleman thinks the past is less real than the future."

When Theo has risen from the chair on which he breakfasts, and settled himself in the chair under which he keeps his shoes, that true bass note is apt to sound more clearly through his discourse. Sometimes it is thought to sound a little too loud.

"Not worms, Theodore. Churchyards I

don't mind, but not worms at breakfast, please."

A pause.

"I wonder if anyone has ever died at breakfast."

Coming back from my walk I would generally hear that Theo had gone up past the ricks; or as I neared the first gate I would see him descending the slope of High Chaldon. In the sitting-room all signs of his work would be tidied away, and the Bible would be left alone with the ink-pot. Now it was time for dinner, that main meal eaten, as in the best epochs of English civilisation, in early afternoon. Before long the Royal Mail will be on the green, and there may be a letter of Theo's for it to carry away. As the affair of Mr Melrose and the turnips has shown, Theo pays his correspondents the courtesy of a serious attention. Any important letter will be submitted for suggestions and comments. I have never known these suggestions received with anything but Christian meekness, and equally, I have never known of any them to be incorporated in the text. Sometimes there are very ticklish points to be got round, as when a gentleman who had

written once or twice in a friendly spirit from Bristol had to be prepared for the shock of finding that his surname was also borne by the vicar of East Dodder. Any author may find himself in such a predicament, unless he keep to such names as Smith and Jones, in which case I suppose a notice on the front page of the Times would be held as sufficiently covering the tort, and I begged Theo to let me make a copy of the letter for my own need. He licked up the envelope with great nimbleness, for I had already shown myself pretty forward with suggestions, and who knows with a woman what double-dealings she won't be up to, so that all I retained of it were the words: "I should not like you to have the shock of seeing your own name."

Theo is too careful about his letters to post them himself. To show Francis that other people besides sons can deal a little in lampoons, I asked him once if his father had remembered to remind Violet to post his letters the right way up?

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Glen Cavaliero

The Powys Family and Dorset

Of all the English counties described in the writings of the Powys family, Dorset holds the central place. Derbyshire, where John Cowper and Theodore Powys were born, hardly impinges on the family's geographical consciousness, save for a few pages in the former's *Autobiography*; while Norfolk, the place of maternal ancestry and of family holidays, is only described in the early chapters of *A Glastonbury Romance*. *Rodmoor*, it is true, does have an East Anglian setting; but the precise location is vague and does not correspond with exactitude to any known locality. The landscape in this novel would seem to be a distillation of John Cowper Powys's own awareness of the Suffolk coast (perhaps as a result of visits to Theodore at Sweffling, which is not far from Aldeburgh and Dunwich) and of his boyhood apprehension of Weymouth's Lodmoor; and its significance arises more from its correspondence to the prevailing mood of the novel than to any biographical associations. Norfolk, in John Cowper's world, is more a country of the mind than a physical reality.

Somerset would seem to have strong claims to be the chief Powysian County; and Montacute is certainly important in the family's geographical myth. But Montacute is close to the Dorset border; and the more distinctively Somerset landscape of marsh and moor is, like that of Norfolk, less integral to the Powys world than are the chalk downs and wooded valleys of Dorset.

The family association with Dorset was paternal; and the Rev. Charles Francis Powys's upbringing at Stalbridge Rectory in Blackmore Vale seems to have been decisive in fixing the family's loyalty to a county in which seven of his children were at one time or another to make their home. And of the

various Dorset towns it is Weymouth which must hold prior place as the centre of family feeling, Weymouth described with such infectious appreciation by John Cowper and Llewelyn. What is significant about the Powys family's connection with Dorset is the imaginative inspiration which the county afforded to them; and the relation between its landscape and the three brothers' individual creativity is significant for any understanding of their art.

Of those three John Cowper Powys is the one least attached to Dorset in a physical sense. His sojourn at East Chaldon on his return from America in 1934 was short; and although he lived for a brief while in Dorchester, *Maiden Castle* was finished in Corwen, North Wales; so that (though to a lesser extent than its predecessors) it is a book written by one absent from its setting.



T. F. Powys's first cottage at East Chaldon, 1904-1908

The point to make here is that John Cowper Powys was a novelist for whom the imaginative vision was of prime importance, not only in the subject matter of his books but also in the writing of them: his use of Dorset is essentially subjective and emotional—though historical and sociological aspects are also present in his fiction. But his concern was with what were for him the psychic emanations of particular places, and it is this factor which accounts for the fascination his descriptive prose can exert (just as it also helps to account for the hostility it arouses). The treatment of Weymouth in his fiction is instructive in this connection: in *Wood and Stone* (and more indirectly in *Wolf Solent*) the town becomes a symbol of release and personal liberation, and is described in vivid, impressionistic terms. But in *Weymouth Sands* this very way of looking at the place becomes a leading subject in the novel, so that the characters appear to be living in two places simultaneously—the ‘real’ Weymouth and the Weymouth of each one’s imaginative apprehension. This duality makes the English first edition, *Jobber Skald*, with its disguised place names, less maimed than it might have been had the novel been purely of the naturalistic kind.

It is, however, to *Ducdame* that we must turn for John Cowper’s quintessential account of the Dorset landscape—quintessential, that is to say, for his art: the landscape itself is that of north Dorset where it nears the Somerset border rather than the more distinctively Dorset world of chalk-downs and sea. In this novel the presence of the woods and hills and water-meadows of Frome-side is overpowering, and in it Powys’s particular gift of distilled impressionism, which he shares with Walter Pater, finds its most eloquent expression.

The closing of spring days in an ancient country town has a glamour about it of a quality more delicate and penetrating than anything that can be reached in the leafiest and remotest solitudes. The sense of the open

roads stretching out from the lighted thoroughfares into the embalmed darkness; the fragrance of lilac bushes from invisible walled gardens; the emerging of the impression of new-leaved greenness from behind the moss-covered gates of church precincts and almshouse precincts; the twilight presence of newly planted pansies and primulas in old Georgian window frames; all these things together, mingled with sudden breaths of mud-scented coolness coming up from river banks, where the great moist marigold buds are swelling in the darkness, give to the streets of such a town an enchantment that has the power to summon up and embody the rarest memories of our race consciousness.¹

Here the effect is gained by a characteristic accumulation of detail, a catalogue that is applied to the page almost as if the words were painted on it. The stress is on the subjective, remembered apprehensions, though the detail is meticulously observed; and the verbal medium is deliberately ‘bookish’ in its play on earlier literary associations. And while the scene is formally urban, we are always aware of its natural setting. This aspect of urban life is one which John Cowper makes especially his own—passage after passage in the *Autobiography* makes one aware of it; and in the Wessex novels we can observe a progressive humanising of the presentation analogous to the urban awareness in the above passage, mediating the transcendental vision through everyday things.

Up and down on the sound of St Peter’s bells [Wizzie’s] spirit floated, like a boat on a brimming tide. How massive and compact all the houses were in this old town! How they seemed to settle their patient stones into the solid earth just as if they were searching . . . down to yet older ones . . . And the fancy came to her as she walked along clutching D’s arm that what made the town so still was purely the sound of these bells. Everything was listening to them. Not only the people, but their furniture; and not only the furniture, but the geraniums and calceolarias in the window-boxes!²

This passage is typical of John Cowper’s mature art, by which he succeeded in

humanising romantic perceptions that might otherwise seem far-fetched or morbid. And he always starts from the real. His Weymouth and Dorchester are the towns we know; and we know better what it means to know them, and how to know them, when we read his work. From recollection of the particular he attains the universal.

This recollection of the particular is likewise a mainspring of the art of Llewelyn Powys. It is he, even more than John Cowper, who has created the Powys family myth. Again and again in his essays and travel books he refers to Dorset and the Powys's life there; his genius was peculiarly autobiographical. What gives it its especial quality, however, is the way in which he can superimpose landscape on landscape, relating the various scenes he visited to each other, and all of them to Dorset. His first book, *Ebony and Ivory*, juxtaposed essays on England and on Africa; his mature work aims more at a fusion, reaching its logical expression in *Love and Death*, where past and present, imaginary and real, dream and waking, the world of boyhood and the world of his deathbed are all aspects of a single response to reality. It is here that his art most resembles that of his eldest brother and differs most sharply from that of Theodore. In the latter's work such subjectivities have no place.

Llewelyn Powys is, however, the one of the three brothers with the most strongly developed sense of history, in this also being the one most closely to resemble Hardy. An examination of his essays will show how naturally his mind turned from the present to an evocation of the past, from there moving on to philosophical reflection of a universalising kind. While maintaining a firm hold on external realities, he does in his essays make use of them as part of a greater literary design; the application, the prevailing personal drive behind them, induce a sense of concentration, of the ordering power of the imagination more exact, though more limited, than that found in John Cowper's work.

This feeling for particularities comes over most strongly in the way in which, in book

after book, he returns to that Dorset cliff landscape which will now be always associated with him. The White Nose, Bat's Head, Chydyok are names that for his readers have a magic akin to that of Housman's Ludlow or Wenlock. Few places can have contributed so much to a writer's personal philosophy (though the Cornish clay-pits' effect upon the poet Jack Clemo, himself an admirer of T. F. Powys's work, is a still more striking example). In Llewelyn's case it is easy to see how his philosophy comes to be influenced by and mediated through his awareness of space. Consider his description of the cormorants in *Glory of Life*.

The damp white cliffs above the deserted sea-washed beaches are set with small images, images of satanic saints, each in its Parian niche. They are cormorants roosting, cormorants dozing in the twilight, cormorants dreaming of diving feats through dark waters in the wake of white flickering fish. The earnest night is fast closing in upon the forlorn beautiful landscape, and flying gulls are scattered far and wide over the dim sky. They float backwards and forwards as uncertainly as the large goose-feather flakes of a snow flurry. High above the wave-resisting shingle, above the dreaming sea-fowl, above the shoulders of the eternal hills, in a clear dizzy ether under haggard storm clouds these birds call to each other in the dolorous tones of their lost language. In the piercing apex of time, lightly suspended between the past and the future, they are consecrated with actual life. It is their hour. Like pentecostal birds of a new schism they initiate a desperate truth. Consider for a moment the mystery implicit in this flock of culvers from the cotes of the curfew earth. These buoyant, wide-winged, corporeal aggregates of quick atoms were not in existence a decade ago. The creative unresting energy of godless nature has, with daedalus craft, gathered the dust of the sullen earth into these volatile forms expressed to carry into the air hungry intestines lightly as leaves in the autumn. Where are now the gulls I listened to on these same cliffs as a boy? What rigorous displacement has dispersed those web feet, those feathers, those beaks of horn? They have been drawn back into the secret residua of matter, and

from other egg artefacts on dusty precipitous platforms bright with sea sunshine other birds have risen.³

Such prose does make, as John Cowper observed, "an incomparable ado" and its music has not been heard since. It may be argued that the careful orchestration of the passage, the alliteration and adjectival elaboration militate against an awareness of the starkly simple philosophy the passage propounds; but by the same token one can also perceive how the landscape influences the man, calling up a poetic response which, as it articulates itself, invokes a philosophical conclusion. If in John Cowper's work we are aware of how men half-create the world they inhabit, in Llewelyn's we see a man's responses created by the world he lives in. The sense of sea and sky and wheeling gulls permeates his message of life's transitoriness and the consequent need for freedom and space for the human spirit. The influence of the Dorset cliffs had been far-reaching.

Llewelyn's own influence on the Powys family myth has likewise been considerable. Even more than John Cowper does he make of his family world a mythology; and the accounts of the brothers and sisters and their parents in *Skin for Skin* and *Love and Death* and the essays have been reinforced by the publication of his letters. Here again the Dorset landscape is prominent, and perhaps more effectively evoked than in the philosophical books. A good example of this biographical gift can be found in *Skin for Skin*, with its memorable portrait of Theodore.

It was on just such a morning that we set out across Egdon Heath to visit a tavern called The Seven Sisters, on the other side of Giddy Green. The sun caressed the heath, and the moorland streams flowed merrily along in their black peat beds, each piece of gravel below their crinkled waters shining like a tiny nugget of gold. Theodore looked about him, an expression of miching mallecho flickering across his goblin features. I could not tell what was amusing him; but soon he said, "You don't find the aspect of the moor, on such a day as this, described by Thomas

Hardy." However, the day was not destined to remain fine; for presently the wind backed to the south, and the sky became overcast. We rested on the side of a tumulus, which lay like an enormous, inverted urn at the centre of the brown waste. To the right, at the top of a sandy pit, stood a single fir tree, stunted, storm-riven. We noted how the ground below the heather was covered with an exquisite web of white lichen. Presently from the direction of the fir tree, came a rabbit, with a stoat after it. It was over-taken in the gravel-pit below. We heard its cries, as, rolling over and over, it felt the teeth of its vicious enemy sink into its jugular vein. Theodore ran forward and began throwing stones into the brambles, wherever he judged the struggling rabbit was. I stood by his side, feeling, I am ashamed to say, a kind of exultation in the thought of what was taking place. It gave me, I confess it, a sharp, attenuated refreshment to think of the tussle, down there below, between the mild-eyed, harmless, soft-furred creature and its lithe enemy, muscular and merciless.⁴

This is Llewelyn Powys at his best: the scene, and there are many such in his writings, shows him using as a biographer the methods of a novelist.

Another memorable portrait in *Skin for Skin* is that of Philippa Powys; and she likewise is associated with the downland landscape of Chydyok. But most especially does one think of her when looking down upon the wild tangle of the Undercliff below White Nose, a place where she loved to wander, and of which she wrote in *Driftwood*.

Who is there, if I am not there?
When the rays of the autumn sun
Light upon the bramble wild,
Clustered full with chosen fruit.

Musing slow, from bush to bush,
I find relief and unsullied peace,
As the various sounds around me
Charm my senses, worn and spent.

It is as if the minstrel old,
Touched the cords of lasting measure,
Capturing there, the sea's deep bass,
Balanced by the raven's croak,
While the lighter treble bars,
Transfix the linnet's clearer notes.

And ever present, piercing forth,
Rise the high-pitched strings of the violins
Which mock the seagulls flying home,
To their dusky savage haunts.

When next I listen, I hear them chant,
The low chorus of the wind at night,
Called awake by streams of radiance
As the sun in splendour sinks.

Who is there, if I am not there?
When upon the under-cliff,
Distant sounds of mellow shade
Bear my soul with them away,
Though my hands are stained in blood,
By the jealous bramble thorn.⁵

Philippa Powys had a sensibility especially her own and yet unmistakably Powysian: her response to nature is never sentimental, but is none the less passionate and intense. To read her poems and her novel *The Blackthorn Winter* is to be aware of the West Country fields and cliffs and lanes as they were experienced by one who has really worked and trodden them.

This authenticity with regard to rural life as such is a notable though rather undervalued aspect of the work of Theodore Powys. He, of all the Powys family, probably knew the life of Dorset best, knowing it, as he did, in the capacity of the most permanent of residents. His choice of a retired, contemplative existence, too easily branded nowadays as 'escapist', enabled him to respond to the rhythms and pace of rural life in a way that lends conviction even to his most fanciful or extravagant tales. The landscapes are not so much described as implied; the details are of the barest, and yet for all the lack of scene-painting they make the reader feel that he is 'there', in a particular locality, no less than he does in the work of John Cowper or Llewelyn. The difference between Theodore's work and theirs lies rather, as I have already indicated, in his greater objectivity. Folly Down and Madder and Tadnol and Norbury are places without history or especial associations—they are distillations, but distillations of East Chaldon or any village rather than

distillations of the impressions of the observer. This is not to say that T. F. Powys does not project his own vision on to them—of course he does, no less than John Cowper projects his very different one upon Sherborne or Weymouth; but the presentation is detached, and the author stands aside from his own creation.

This universalising of Dorset means that the county as such barely figures in the novels and tales: there is nothing regional about them. About the nearest to such a feeling that one gets is in some of the place names and in the presence of Madder Hill, an open chalk down where all are free to walk—unless chased off by Farmer Mew. Such descriptions as there are are general and reflective; but in the descriptions of his characters Theodore shows how deeply the rural scene was a part of his thinking. Here is one such vignette from *Mark Only*, the most Hardy-esque of the novels.

Mr Peach was a small man, by trade a thatcher; he possessed a moustache that hung down and side-whiskers that stuck out, giving his face both a merry and a dejected appearance. He looked, if such a man can look like anything except himself, like a bundle of old hay somewhat dampish.⁶

The imagery in his work always arises out of the experience described: his imagination is all of a piece.

As an example of his absorption of village life into his imagination we may turn to the opening of *Mockery Gap* a village which, as Harry Coombes suggests, recalls that of Osmington between Weymouth and East Chaldon. Here we have a fine example of Powys's peculiar descriptive technique.

If a realm, settled and solidified, hath the three estates to boast of, so indeed have every small village. The separate conditions of men are not marked upon them alone by their polite speech or tailor-made clothes, for the very lanes they live in and the paths to their homes brand their caste upon them.

No gentleman of the first estate at Mockery could ever have been expected to get a living from the sea, and none except those who belonged to the third would ever go down to it to fish.⁷

The sea, in addition to its traditional symbolic associations of danger, chaos and fecundity, is also in this novel the haunt of the Fisherman, the youngest and most romantic of Powys's figures to offer salvation to mortal men. The remark about the third estate looks forward to their revelation as being, not the poor or commons, but the children—the Biblical implications of the above passage will then be apparent.

The second estate was represented by the village green, the roots of an elm, and a grassy path that led to Mr Gulliver's small farmhouse.

Beside the green was Mrs Moggs' shop, that had the proper appearance of modest affluence that the green also reflected because it was so near. In the shop and upon the green a decent behaviour that naturally goes with the middle order of being was expected to be seen. And when the first estate stooped to enter this domain it very properly showed by its polite manner of speaking that every civilised village is welded and held together by its middle.

The mechanical note struck by that "welded" implies a radical criticism of the kind of social ordering which the village, or rather the first estate, represents. And the criticism is carried further in the next paragraph.

The road that typified the first estate was by the right of long custom called 'The Church Way'. Here there lived the Pinks and the Pattimores, and along a real drive with real gravel there lived Farmer Cheney, who by reason of his money-bags had acquired this place of honour.

Here the attack is more frontal: the 'real' gravel and the robust, almost nursery vigour of 'money-bags' carry a savage mockery that is one of Powys's characteristics (it is one he shares with John Cowper, who, however, usually employs a gentler irony: one recalls his delight in Alfred de Kantzow's "Powys, we must propitiate magnates", recorded in the *Autobiography*.)

The third estate was the children.

These children, though some lived along the Church Way beside the vicarage garden gate, had pulled all who belonged to them, even though their parents might wish to rise, deep down into the mire of the lowest degree. The children pulled with them their teacher Mrs Topple who suffered from a bad leg and deserved a better one.

The children in this novel would seem to reflect Theodore's shrinking from taking his walks through the village. And notice how by placing "with them" *before* "their teacher" he increases the force of that pulling—not to mention his coining of the teacher's name. The final sentence of this paragraph is a nice example of his balanced style.

The village school was an unlocked prison, for it kept the children in durance for only a short part of the day; and when Mrs Topple opened the door and let the wretches free, the two upper estates bemoaned the lack of a village constable.

The comedy here is subtle. That "wretches" is ambiguous: Powys is a writer whom one must not read in a hurry. It needs the pace of Madder or Dodderdown to appreciate him.

The boundaries of Mockery are important.

In front of Mockery, to the south, was the untamed and variable element, now noisy and now quiet, now high and now low—the sea. To the north was the hill. To the east a country of stone walls, rough stony fields, and a people who were said never to shut the door after them when they went out of a room. To the west there was the Mockery wood, the other side of which, if you walked far enough and didn't mind being a stranger to the cows you met, you might find an aunt to talk to, or even a Squire Roddy if you reached Weyminster.

When Powys does introduce his geographical symbolism he does so through the village consciousness, from *inside* his world. The comedy is implicit and subdued—the indefinite article before "aunt" and "Squire" is first seemingly innocent,

then downright mischievous. In Powys's style the words are often glancing several ways at once. The slower you read, the more you see.

In every village almost that we can think of, and Mockery was no exception, there is a blind lane that leads nowhere, or at least, if it does lead somewhere, 'tis but to a cottage and a pond, and there the lane ends. No lane could better suggest a good path to somewhere than did Mr Caddy's. It curved temptingly down a little hill, and at the end of thirty yards there was the pond and nothing more, except Mr Caddy's cottage, that any one could see from the road, from which road a child could easily have thrown a stone into the pond.

The paragraph curves round with the lane: it starts with a piece of affectionate observation, narrows to a particularity about the Mockery lane; which is in turn an occasion for sly humour when we consider that "thirty yards" and the children throwing stones. This and the preceding paragraph effect a slight dislocation in our sense of space: an element of strangeness is struck, in preparation for the Fisherman, rather as time stops for Mr Weston's advent at Folly Down. As in the work of all visionary artists we open out from the particular to the general.

Theodore Powys's work has never won general acceptance and is perhaps unlikely to do so, for the values it embodies are not those of the majority. Nor is he likely to become a "Dorset novelist" in the sense that Hardy is one; that kind of description would be more appropriate to John Cowper. But all three Powys brothers deserve well of Dorset, for in their books we find the county celebrated and made the matter of three very different kinds of art. John Cowper's Dorset is the scene of novels which explore, among so many things, the shared geographical awareness of particular places and its effect upon human lives. It is the *space* of Dorset which pre-occupies him. Llewelyn seems more concerned with time; but both are alike in their raising of the Dorset landscape to something viewed with a visionary intensity. They aid our own perceptions. Theodore assumes Dorset into his own kind of visionary awareness: he makes a mythology from it of a more general kind than that attempted by his brothers. But all of them make Dorset real to the men and women who read them, so that they in their turn can bring something to it, in the way of affection, inspiration, care. What Dorset gave the Powyses Dorset has given to their readers.

Notes

¹*Ducdame*, 1925, p. 180.

²*Maiden Castle*, 1937, p. 332.

³*Glory of Life*, 2nd ed. 1949, pp. 18-19.

⁴*Skin for Skin*, 1926, pp. 99-100, 2nd ed. 1948, pp. 72-73.

⁵*Driftwood*, 1930, pp. 20-21. (The poem is printed here as published.)

⁶*Mark Only*, 1924, p. 57.

⁷*Mockery Gap*, 1925, p. 3; subsequent quotations pp. 3-5.

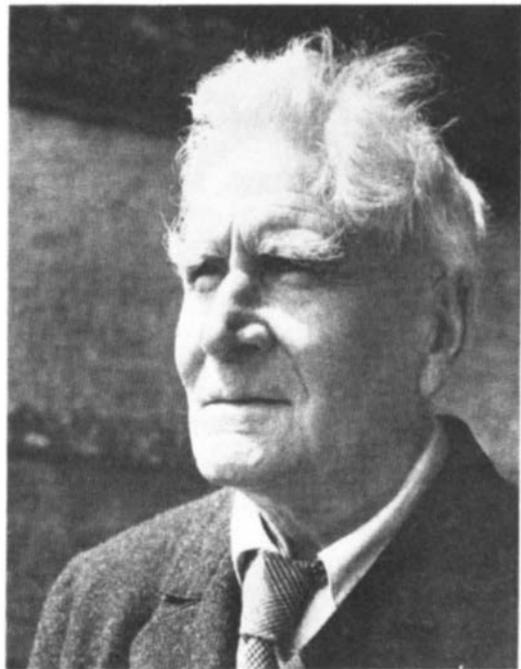
Marius Buning

Mappowder Revisited: T. F. Powys's Reading in Retirement

In a recent article in this review, Peter Riley, with whom in 1965 I visited the villages where T. F. Powys had lived, East Chaldon and Mappowder, has considered his fiction in the light of his final twenty years of non-writing.¹ He has put all readers of Powys's work in his debt by the publication of Miss Vera Wainright's notes, in the form of fifteen points or "remarks" made by the author during his Mappowder days, which give us some further insight into Powys's mental habits and his consciousness as a writer. One is always grateful for any snippets of information about an author one loves and admires. In the case of Powys this holds particularly true, since his decision to give up writing in 1936 has always baffled his readers, nor have his own reasons for his doing so—as stated in the well-known interview "Why I Gave Up Writing"—been felt to be entirely satisfactory.²

T. F. Powys's final twenty years of non-writing have, in fact, always remained a vacuum in what few studies we have of this author. This is conspicuously the case in Kenneth Hopkins's *The Powys Brothers*, subtitled "A Biographical Appreciation", which only reports that "the years at Mappowder were tranquil, with the monotony he liked".³ Compared to the globetrotting of his elder brother, John Cowper, or the moving Keatsian life-style of the younger, Llewelyn, the Second Brother seems to have lead a monotonous life indeed: "I did nothing, I went nowhere, I met nobody", as Powys himself said.⁴ Even Miss Vera Wainright's recorded notes cannot altogether take away such an impression. For what they amount to is, in fact, little in comparison with the immense silence of his Mappowder days.

Peter Riley has further obliged us by offering an "explanation" for the silence of these last years. He sees Powys's retirement as the inevitable outcome of the nature of his writings as a whole, in which he discerns a gradual drift towards reduction of language and of the world as perceived in the text. Equally the authorial self in his fiction is progressively reduced to minimalness, much like the selfhood, or the sense of identity, of the fictional characters themselves gravitates towards vacuity; hence his predilection for death and the void. The final outcome of this process of minimalization is the reduction of meaning itself, which runs parallel to Powys's increasing pessimism manifest in the "minimal bleakness" of the last stories written between 1930-1933. Powys's suc-



T. F. Powys, 1942

cessor, Peter Riley concludes, is Samuel Beckett whose most recent prose work, it may be added, is significantly called *Fizzles*, or feeble splutters.⁵

Powys's retirement and the final twenty years are thus accounted for as the post-literary condition he had created and perpetuated by his writing, which has now come back upon its author to possess him. In other words, Powys has become the victim, as it were, of his own fictional world. Hence the silence, the seclusion and the diurnal regularity of his Mappowder days, spent in a small, low house, "The Lodge", at a stone's throw from the old churchyard, waiting for death and nothingness.

There is much to be appreciated in Peter Riley's closely argued thesis, which is most original and based upon much inwardness with Powys's life and writings. I have little to quarrel with in his overall interpretation of Powys's work in terms of reduction of meaning and pessimism as outlined above. Nor do I object, as some readers may be inclined to, to the structuralist terms in which he has couched his argument, such as "signifier of the action", "contextual field of reference", "process of signification" and the like, although his case would remain equally valid without this jargon. He has, at least, the advantage of bringing criticism of Powys into the seventies, thereby making his work accessible to the critical climate of the present day. Such a structuralist reading, moreover, facilitates the comparison with Samuel Beckett's fiction with which I whole-heartedly agree, although I draw different conclusions.

It is, however, this very comparison that should make the reader hesitate to accept Riley's thesis. For Beckett's own development as a writer, obsessed as he is by the reduction of meaning and expression, which stems from a deep-seated pessimism scarcely ever attained by Powys, shows that "minimal bleakness" need not lead to absolute silence. For Beckett has gone on writing and producing until this very day. And so had other pessimistic writers and sceptics before him whose works Powys had read and pondered upon.

The Belgian Symbolist poet, dramatist and essayist Maurice Maeterlinck may serve as another illustration. Maeterlinck's *The Treasure of the Humble* Powys received as early as 1911 and his *Before the Great Silence* he read very closely after he had given up writing.⁶ I mention Maeterlinck, because it so turns out that the same author has also been a formative influence upon Samuel Beckett, whose interest in Maeterlinck, more particularly in his plays of the eighteen nineties, such as *Les Aveugles* and *L'Intruse*, has been acknowledged by one or two Beckett critics. The importance of *Before the Great Silence* has so far remained unnoticed both by Beckett and by Powys scholars.⁷ Yet it is this book *par excellence* that allows us to link up Powys's fiction and philosophy with Beckett's, whilst providing an interesting commentary upon Powys's own work as a writer at the same time.

Before the Great Silence, a distinguished prose work, is the first of the so-called Pascalian series of six studies, or enquiries into man and the universe, which Maeterlinck wrote between 1934 and 1942. It consists of short, more or less independent paragraphs, many of which have the lapidary force of epigrams. It was written long after the success of his plays and of *The Blue Bird*, which Powys had also read, as his comment in the margin shows: "Because you made money by that play you need not always remind us of it".⁸ *Before the Great Silence* is about man destined to die in a universe which, when confronted and interrogated, offers no great secret, only a "great silence". Maeterlinck's work is deeply imbued with philosophical pessimism, rejecting the consolations of Christianity and of Stoicism in favour of agnosticism and mysticism without mystery.⁹ His philosophy was, among others, much influenced by Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Pascal and Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor famous for his stoic *Meditations*, all of whom were formative influences on Powys himself, as I will show later.

Out of the 120 marked up passages and

more than 30 marginal comments in Powys's copy of *Before the Great Silence*, I have chosen a few, representative examples to illustrate the common ground of interest between Powys and Beckett.

On Death:

Human beings have only one certain and inalienable felicity: it is, that they can hope for death. (p. 184)

On agnosticism:

What we have called God is as unimaginable as that which the science of the day calls ether, the Universe, Nature, etc. The only progress which we have accomplished is progress in agnosticism. Is it possible that agnosticism will ever lead us anywhere? We do not know; but in the mean time it saves us from wasting our time in futile excursions. (p. 96)

On nothingness:

Has the Universe a purpose or purposes? Yes or no? This is to ask whether it has a goal, an end, *which is impossible*, since this goal, this end, would have been reached since time began.

And if this goal, this end, could be reached, would it not imply equilibrium and immobility—that is, death and nothingness? (p. 105, underlining by Powys)

and:

If we draw up the balance sheet of all that man has done since his appearance on earth, we note that he has found out nothing about life, nothing about death, nothing about God, or the Universe, nothing about space and time; he can tell us a few uncertain words about light, heat, electricity, and gravitation, but nothing about spirit and matter, nothing about eternity, nothing about the infinite, nothing about good and evil, nothing about the origin, or the purpose, or the end of things. It is high time that he set to work in earnest. (pp. 177-178)

On Stoicism:

. . . No more than he [Marcus Aurelius] do we know whence we come, whither we are going, nor why we exist. (p. 108)

It would lead us too far to relate these statements to Beckett's *oeuvre*; to any well-informed reader of his work they must have a familiar ring.

Such passages and many more in a similar vein Powys apparently approved of. At times he can even outdo his master in pessimism. Thus when Maeterlinck speaks of the "nauseating boxes" in which the dead are imprisoned, Powys writes in the margin: "very *good* boxes" (p. 123, his underlining). To Maeterlinck's statement "For only the fear of death—an absurd fear—helps us to prolong life into the desert of old age", he replies with, "not absurd at all" (p. 91). On the paragraph:

Our normal state is death, or rather, the impersonal and anonymous life. That which we call our life is only a momentary *state of grace*, which doubtless will never return (p. 191, underlining by Powys)

he comments caustically: "Not exactly a state of grace".

Not that Powys always agreed with Maeterlinck's views. When Maeterlinck declares that "There are no dead, because all the dead are living and all the living are dead. The living live in the dead and the dead in the living, spiritually and materially", we find Powys writing in the margin: "Here Master Maurice you get a little silly" (p. 46), and when he writes "When our dead speak to us it is the best in ourselves that is speaking to us, having borrowed their voice", Powys puts a question mark followed by the strong exclamations "Ass" and "Fool" against the next paragraph (p. 89). On the opposite page he writes: "The end of man is ground", which sums up his own view to perfection. It would seem that whenever Maeterlinck is carried away too much by his own search for some sort of consolation, or by his desire to produce beautifully constructed epigrams at the expense of philosophical consistency, Powys corrects him coolly and critically.

It is also clear that he shared Maeterlinck's preoccupations with death and nothingness to the full, so that his reading

of *Before the Great Silence* can be seen as a fitting post-literary commentary on his own work at the same time. For every well-informed Powys reader will, no doubt, have recognized those and similar themes as aspects of Powys's vision, which can be traced throughout his work.

My main objection to Riley's thesis is that it relates Powys's pessimism too much to its author and not enough to the kind of tradition it belongs to. There is every reason to see his fiction as part of the literature of pessimism, which has a venerable history in Western culture. Stemming from the Socratic school of philosophy and the writings of the Stoics, notably Epicurus, as well as from Near-Eastern texts, this tradition was carried on in literature by Christian sages in the wake of that central document of pessimism, *Ecclesiastes*, by French writers, such as Montaigne and Pascal, German philosophers like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, by Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and others.

Pessimism may be briefly glossed as the view that this world is not the best of possible worlds, that human life involves substantially more pain than pleasure and that nature is indifferent to both moral good and evil and to the happiness or unhappiness of its creatures. Scepticism, which doubts the claims of knowledge, especially in religion, can be seen as the natural concomitant to pessimism. Writers on the subject have pointed out, however, that scepticism can serve to balance and offset pessimism. For from another perspective scepticism is "the hope of attaining quietude", it can bring peace of mind, for "nothing can contribute more to peace of soul than having no opinions at all".¹⁰

It seems to me that such is precisely the case with Powys. His pessimism is, in fact, thoroughly classic(al) and there is therefore no reason to regard it as the product of a personal situation only, or to diagnose it as the consequence of anxiety or obsession. From the history of pessimism it cannot be argued that such a view leads *per se* to a predilection for death and the void, or to a

personal blockage, non-writing and silence, as Peter Riley has concluded. Moreover, it can be established beyond doubt that Powys was widely read in the literature of pessimism and scepticism. Many of the classics of that tradition were on his bookshelves and can still be inspected in Mr Bissell's marvellous collection of Powysiana.¹¹

Since Powys was in the habit of marking up what he felt to be significant passages and using margins for comments, usually when he wished to enter into discussion with the author, or to incorporate references to other authors, it is possible to reconstruct up to a point Powys's mental environment by studying closely his reading habits during his Mappowder days. In what follows I hope to contribute a small chapter to Powys's 'inner biography' of the last twenty years of non-writing, which will correct the one-sided pictures that have been drawn up by some critics so far. His Mappowder readings and ponderings will also shed some further light on the vexed question of Powys's religion and mysticism, besides providing further insight into his own creative work.¹²

For this purpose I have chosen the seven most heavily marked up books Powys read between his removal to Mappowder in 1940 and his death in 1953. These are in alphabetical order:

Richard Baxter, *The Autobiography* (London, 1931).

Jacob Boehme, *The Signature of All Things* (London, undated).

C. Bayley, ed., *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (London, 1926).

J. P. Eckermann, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann* (London, 1930).

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London, undated, tr. W. Trotter, with an introduction by T. S. Eliot).

Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (London, 1934).

Simone Weil, *Waiting on God* (London, 1951, tr. E. Craufurd).

This does not, of course, represent the order in which he read these works; he was

in the habit of reading some authors two or even three times, like Pascal and Spinoza whom he each read three times in 1937, 1939 and 1946 and 1950 respectively, often indicating in the margin the date of (re) reading. He also read different books at the same time. Thus of these seven books he had read all of them already in his late East Chaldon days, with the exception of Epicurus whom he read twice in 1942 and 1950, and Goethe and Simone Weil whom he both read for the first time in the summer months of 1952 shortly before his death, foreshadowed in some moving marginal comments on his reading Goethe: "You see Humboldt, it is all over with me" (p. 274).

It is important to bear in mind that Powys developed this habit of marking up passages and making marginal notes from 1937, shortly after he had officially given up writing.¹³ In that year he read Baxter, Pascal and Spinoza in that way for the first time. This reading habit was to become in the course of the next fifteen years his personal form of *agraphia*, his mode of self-expression, after he had given up writing officially. So to complete the picture of Powys's mental surroundings we should add the three most extensively marked up books which he read during his late East Chaldon days, if only once. Apart from Maeterlinck's *Before the Great Silence*, discussed above, these include George Fox, *The Journal* (London, 1924) and J. H. Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London, 1938), which he read closely in the latter half of 1939.

When we compare his Mappowder reading with his reading during the last years at East Chaldon, it becomes clear that he marked up virtually the same books and in the same way, for example in 1939 when he read Boehme, Fox, Newman, Pascal and Spinoza, except that there are decidedly fewer literary references to be found in the margins and that he entered less directly and less often into discussion with the author in the later years.¹⁴ The handwriting itself can be distinguished even by the inexperienced graphological eye into early and late

pencil marking; it becomes feebler in the last two or three years. Powys was in the habit of marking up by single, or sometimes by means of double vertical marks in the margins, as well as by underlining whole sentences or phrases and occasionally a single word. When he becomes emotionally involved, his markings tend to become more irregular or more thickly drawn.

It strikes me that these ten authors, different though they are, share to a considerable degree a certain basic outlook and life-style to which Powys was temperamentally drawn and with which he could identify himself, as his markings-up show.

Firstly, they all display in their lives a tendency to withdraw from worldly affairs in preference to simpler and more concentrated forms of living, either in the country or the convent. They have often renounced worldly honours and occupations in exchange for meditation and writing. In some cases this is entirely a matter of free choice, as for instance Epicurus for whom withdrawal from human competition and from the noise of the world in order to 'live hidden' in his Garden school in Athens was simply part of his ethical philosophy.¹⁵ As for the seventeenth century figures like Baxter and Fox, as country parsons they remained faithful to local, small-town affairs. Boehme became a simple, intellectual cobbler, and on the fly-leaf of his *The Signature of All Things* Powys wrote: "A true Christian has nothing to contend for". Spinoza retired to the small village of Reynsburg and earned his living grinding optical lenses, while writing his *Ethics*. Pascal withdrew into the convent of Port Royal, although he was not oblivious to the calls of the outer world. As for Goethe, it is the ageing poet of *Wilhelm Meister's Travels*, sub-titled 'Renunciation' (*die Entsagenden*) and of a cycle of philosophical poems entitled *God and World* that Powys was particularly fond of, rather than the romantic, 'worldly' Goethe. J. H. Newman, another remarkable churchman, gave up Oxford honours to retire to a small chapelry. Maeterlinck wrote his series of Pascalian enquiries into man and the

universe after having turned his back on Paris and the theatre; and Simone Weil alternated working in a car factory and teaching with a hermit-like life of meditation and writing.

Secondly, this retirement from worldly affairs is often enough the result of clashes with authority, either worldly or clerical, or—as is the case with the early figures like Baxter, Boehme, Fox, Pascal and Spinoza—a combination of these two forms of power. All of them are controversial figures, often themselves at the centre of controversy or dispute, leading unorthodox lives, brooding over unorthodox systems of thought, or—in the case of Pascal, Newman and Simone Weil—giving orthodoxy their own, unique stamp. They are Catholics 'with a difference' one might say. Of this struggle to attain individuality many of them have given public witness in the form of a spiritual autobiography or diary, like Baxter, Fox, Newman, Pascal and Simone Weil, often to refute charges of atheism or heresy. Others like Epicurus, Boehme and Spinoza published their own systems of thought, asserting their integrity in making up their own minds.

From the way Powys marked up these ten authors it becomes evident that it is for their simplicity, unorthodoxy and their strong sense of individuality that he admires them most. Thus we find him underlining in Epicurus "he was content with nothing but water and a bit of bread" (p. 147) and defending Boehme's way of living, "What! sneer at the gentle craft [of shoemaker]" (p. VIII). In Fox's *Journal* he underlined "I walked out but a little into the fields" (p. 143)—as he was wont to do himself—and "I am become nothing in the world" (p. 199). When Newman writes about the Holy Coat relic, we find Powys commenting: "No Henry, I think every coat worn by a poor man is *Holy*" (p. 288, his underlining).

Not that Powys's apparent identification with simplicity of life-style would lead to artistic self-effacement. When Boehme complains about his critics, he comments: "We

will not heed them Jacob" (p. 22.) and he agrees with him that he only writes for those who wish to know: "Well said Jacob" (p. 161). He heavily marked up Goethe's statement "My works cannot be popular . . . They are written, not for the multitude, but only for individuals who desire something congenial, whose aims are like my own" (p. 271), which might indeed serve as a motto for Powys's own work.

His intense dislike of clerical authority, so much in evidence throughout his own fiction, comes out nowhere more clearly than in his apparent approval of Simone Weil's strongly-voiced opposition to the church as an institution, especially its "collectiveness", which she found hostile to true religion, and its refusal to admit truth outside itself. In her moving letters to Father Perrin, which make up the greater part of *Waiting On God* she lashes out repeatedly against the *anathema sit* (accursed be) formula used ever since the sixth century to mean the severest form of excommunication that formally separates a heretic from the Church and condemns his thoughts. For her—as for Powys—true religion is "that which admits of divinity as secretly present", not as "commanding" (p. 88).¹⁶

With apparent gusto ("hear hear") Powys sided with Fox, who believed in his own inner light, or God-given inspiration rather than in any scriptural authority or creed, against priests and papal authority, as he sympathized with Newman's struggle against prelates and bishops even after his conversion. Whenever Newman runs the risk of condoning Church authority, as for instance when he defends some form of censorship, however, we find Powys commenting: "But Henry, dear Jesus said 'the Truth will make you free'" (p. 221). When Newman writes "Now, considering how the Clergy really are improving", he comments dryly: "I am glad of that Henry" (p. 155). Richard Baxter's *Autobiography*, which records his Puritan opposition to the episcopacy of the Church, was "one of his best and most loved books", as Powys wrote

on the fly-leaf of his own copy. Jacob Boehme's first work was banned by the Lutheran authorities of Görlitz and later he had to take refuge in a castle neighbouring Dresden to avoid imprisonment. Spinoza was excommunicated by the local Amsterdam orthodox Jewish authorities for his non-traditional biblical exegesis and his sympathy for Descartes, and Pascal's clashes with the Jesuits over papal authority have been well documented. So I think it may be concluded from his reading of others that Powys was temperamentally drawn to anti-authoritarian, unorthodox points of view, as indeed his own fiction amply illustrates.

Lastly, all of these authors were concerned in their lives and writings with the search for ultimate reality, which is equivalent to saying that they are profoundly religious writers in the broadest sense of the word. More narrowly defined, some were explicitly Christian, either of the English Protestant variety, like Baxter and Fox, or of the Roman Catholic type, like Pascal, Newman and Simone Weil. Even Epicurus, although he was sceptical of religion as ordinarily understood and practised in his days, never denied that the Gods existed, albeit that they had no transactions with men. Many of his methods make him comparable to a religious figure. In the case of Goethe as a natural philosopher one can, at least, say that he was and remained a grateful heir of the Christian tradition, *bibelfest*, or rooted in the Bible, as he said himself. Goethe claimed, moreover, to be a follower of Spinoza whose pantheistic *weltanschauung* he shared in his own personalistic sort of way. It must not be forgotten that Spinoza's pantheism was deeply embedded in the Christian tradition, however much it offended orthodox Christianity at the time, as one of the central chapters in *Ethics*, "Concerning God"—which Powys marked up extensively on November 27, 1937—brings out very clearly:

In these propositions I have explained the nature and properties of God; that he

necessarily exists; that he is one alone; that he exists and acts merely from the necessity of his nature; that he is the free cause of all things and in what manner: that all things are in God, and so depend upon him that without him they could neither exist nor be conceived: and finally, that all things were predetermined by God, not through his free or good will, but through his absolute nature or infinite power (p. 30).

Spinoza's belief in a divinity at once immanent, or 'indwelling', and transcendent or metaphysical is also religious in that it overlaps with one of the fundamental beliefs of Christian mysticism, so eloquently expressed by Jacob Boehme, one of the last of the great European mystics whom Powys read concurrently with Spinoza in 1939.¹⁷

This mystic strain runs, in fact, through all of the writings discussed so far. It is also strongly present in Maeterlinck's philosophical writings, notably in *Beyond the Great Silence*, although he had come to reject Christianity. Yet, this does not mean that Powys was a mystic, I think, as some of his friends and some critics, like Gerard Casey in a recent article, have claimed him to be.¹⁸ Against such a view it can be argued that neither in his markings-up, nor in his own fiction for that matter, did Powys ever express agreement with the classic mystical view of union, or at-one-ness with God or the Godhead, often described in terms of a gradual climbing of a 'ladder'. According to a whole host of 'negativistic' mystics, like Meister Eckhart, St John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, William Law, Vaughan and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*—all of whom Powys read attentively—this spiritual ladder:

is seen to correspond with the threefold Way traversed by all mystics, the Active Life through the Way of Purification, whereby men may become true servants of God; the Inner Life, the Way of illumination and the real sonship with God; and the Contemplative Life, which is the Unitive whereby men may attain to true friendship with God.¹⁹

Although one might discern in Powys's writings and his way of life the *via negativa*,

or the mystical way of negation, which consists in voiding and stripping and purifying the soul of every desire, this asceticism never leads in Powys up to the ultimate goal of mysticism which is the upward flight toward perfection and the final attainment of Divine Love. I think it is Powys's innate fear of God and his profound pessimism that forbid us to call him a mystic, believing as he did that:

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.²⁰

Or, as Powys wrote to his brother Llewelyn on May 28th, 1926, "Your brother John calls me a mystic—but a mystic who believes in clay more than in grace I fear".²¹

His life-long preoccupation with God's omnipresence and immanence in man and nature make him, in fact, more of a pantheist than a mystic. This comes out clearly in one of the last stories he wrote, entitled "God", in which Johnnie Chew discovers God in his father's hat, for "he believed that the glory of God might enter and dwell in a common hat as well as in a thornbush", and Powys comments later:

For a good hat, when all is said and done, contains more Godlike properties, and is less variable in substance, than a piece of dry bread, that is thought by a large number of serious and well-behaved persons to be the whole body of their God.²²

It is seen too in the last story we have about him from Mappowder, as recorded by Father Brocard Sewell: "When Theodore Powys was dying a friend read to him from the *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich, and this drew from him one of his

most Theodore-like remarks: 'I like her. I like that thing she said, "God is GROUND"' . . . He had taken it to mean that God was actual ground—EARTH."²³

In any case Powys's religious beliefs cannot be neatly labelled, because, as he said himself: "sometimes I appear to be an infidel and sometimes a believer, sometimes a Christian and sometimes a heathen, and every brave man is just the same as I am".²⁴

The intriguing question why Powys gave up writing can, in my view, not be satisfactorily answered, either by Peter Riley's thesis that the silence of Mappowder was the logical outcome of his fiction, or by Gerard Casey's view, which sees it as the result of his devotional and mystical nature that no longer needed literary expression, for neither Beckettian pessimism nor the mystical way of negation lead necessarily to absolute silence.

On the basis of his re-readings and marking-up practices it must be concluded that he remained mentally alert until fatal illness overtook him. Although no longer expressing his views through creative writing, he remained a sceptic, in the etymological sense of an 'enquirer', who continued to ponder upon the mysteries of life, love and death, in the spiritual company of philosophers and writers who had been engaged in a similar search for understanding. Perhaps we have to acquiesce in Powys's own reason for giving up writing, when he said in the 1936 interview: "A writer should know when to stop, when he has said enough".*

*In correspondence with me about this article, Mr. E. E. Bissell made the following comment:

One point not mentioned . . . is the fact that Theodore received a Civil List Pension in 1935. This addition to his small private income may have helped him to say in 1936, "A writer should know when to stop, when he has said enough." It would have made it easier to switch from writing to more reading and serious thought.

Notes

¹The Powys Review, Summer 1978, III, 17-31.

²P. Riley, *A Bibliography of T. F. Powys*, Hastings, 1967, pp. 62-64.

³K. Hopkins, *The Powys Brothers*, London, 1967, p. 255; for a criticism of this biography see my "Follydown Revisited: Some New Light on T. F. Powys", *English Studies*, L, 6, 1969, 588-597.

⁴Riley, p. 63.

⁵Samuel Beckett, *Fizzles*, New York, 1976; the English version differently arranged, appeared in the same year as *For Yet To End Again*.

⁶M. Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*, London, 1908, and *Before the Great Silence*, London, 1935. T. F. Powys's copies are owned by Mr. E. E. Bissell.

⁷J. Pilling, *Samuel Beckett*, London, 1976, pp. 155-156.

⁸*Before the Great Silence*, p. 122.

⁹For Maeterlinck criticism see: W. D. Halls, *Maeterlinck: A Study of His Life and Thought*, O.U.P., 1960; B. Knapp, *Maeterlinck*, Boston, 1975; M. Postic, *Maeterlinck et le Symbolisme*, Paris, 1970.

¹⁰Steven J. Rosen, *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*, New Jersey, 1976, pp. 52-53.

¹¹I should like to record here my immense gratitude to Mr. E. E. Bissell, of Ashorne, Warwick, who over a number of years has been most helpful and hospitable in allowing me to study Powysiana at his home.

¹²See, for example, G. Casey's letter to the Editor in *The Powys Review*, Winter/Spring, 1978/1979, IV, 85-86, and his article in the same issue "Three Christian Brothers", 14-20, and J. Hooker's article in that same issue "T. F. Powys: 'The Bass Note'": 35-43; both critics claim Powys to be a Christian writer.

¹³Other authors whose works he read, but marked up less heavily after 1933, include in chronological order of reading: Lao Tse, Lucrece, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Kenneth Hopkins, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Dekker's plays, Samuel Butler, Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner*, etc. (*Works*, Vol. 3), read in

1942, with the interesting comment on p. 207: ["But what do people want?"] "Good wine here and better hereafter", Walter de la Mare, R. G. Collingwood, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, John Ford's plays, Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, read in 1948, Thomas Traherne and Simone Weil's *Gravity and Grace*, probably the very last book he read.

¹⁴Apart from the many cross-references to these ten books, other major literary references include: Blake, Bunyan, Samuel Butler, J. Fawkes, Jeremy Taylor, Charles Kingsley, Samuel Johnson, Milton, Nietzsche, Rabelais and Swift. An American thesis has spotted references and allusions to some 300 authors in Powys's whole oeuvre; see M. Steinmann Jr., *Theodore Powys, A Thematic Study*, University of Minnesota, 1954, Microfilm A 55-520.

¹⁵One of his famous followers was Lucretius whose *De Rerum Natura* ("On the Nature of Things") Powys read after 1934.

¹⁶In Simone Weil Powys must have recognized a kindred mind, as his comment shows: "Ah hermit have I found you out" (p. 126); it would be worthwhile to investigate their relationship further.

¹⁷Boehme's philosophy influenced, among others, William Law whose *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* is a pervasive influence on Powys's fiction. Law's later writings are decidedly mystical.

¹⁸See footnote 12.

¹⁹Pseudo Dionysus Areopagita, *The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies*, tr. the editors of *The Shrine of Wisdom*, Fintry, 1965, p. 27.

²⁰*Soliloquies* (1916), Village Press, 1975, p. 7.

²¹As quoted in Michel Pouillard, *T. F. Powys: La Solitude, le Doute, l'Art*, a doctoral dissertation (University of Grenoble, 1978, 2 vols. His detailed analysis of Powys's religious views (see pp. 497-641) arrives at conclusions similar to my own. I reviewed his thesis for the *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 1980, to appear in the Winter issue.

²²*The Two Thieves*, Chatto and Windus, 1932, pp. 132 and 145.

²³Brocard Sewell, *Theodore: Essays on T. F. Powys*, St. Albert's Press, 1964, p. IX; see also my page 80 for his comment "The end of man is ground".

Denys Val Baker

The Powys Family: Some Memories of the Mid-Forties

During the 1939-1945 war I founded and edited a number of literary magazines and anthologies—among them *Opus*, *Voices*, *Writing Today*, and *International Short Stories*—and this was the indirect way in which I became acquainted both with the work and the personalities of some of the Powys family. The great God, even then, was that most remarkable Old Man of Letters, John Cowper Powys—regrettably I never had a personal meeting but exchanged several interesting letters. They came from a remote village in Wales and sounded like the letters of someone already a little removed from this world, courageously prepared to face the next—if there was one! Although I never got nearer to John Cowper in the flesh than these lively letters, like so many others I felt almost as if I knew him well from reading that marvellous *Autobiography* (still, incidentally, excellent reading to this day), and also through some of the vast novels—like *A Glastonbury Romance*, which I found still a *cause célèbre* in the district when my wife was evacuated to a nursing home at Wookey Hole, site of the famous caves whose setting led to the libel case involving JCP.

It must have been about this time, 1944, when I had my most direct contact with the Powys family. My own magazine, *Opus*, was a pacifist and individualist publication which gathered to it such contributors as Henry Miller, Kenneth Patchen, Derek Stanford, Ernest Martin, L. T. C. Rolt, Hugh MacDiarmid, D. S. Savage, Alex Comfort, Mulk Raj Anand and many others—including Malcolm Elwin, who supplied a most erudite article on Llewelyn Powys.* Always a staunch and indeed

reverent devotee of the work of Llewelyn, Malcom Elwin wrote exuberantly of one remembered by his older brother, Littleton, from childhood days, as “the most sunny, happy, winning small boy”. I cannot refrain from quoting here the concluding paragraph of a most valuable essay:

Throughout the nineteen thirties, though bed-ridden for the most part of his last six years, he continued to write freely and truly of his life’s experience. He hid nothing of himself for, practising the poetic faith he preached, he had nothing to hide. His volumes of essays—*Earth Memories*, *Damnable Opinions*, *Dorset Essays*, *Somerset Essays*, *A Baker’s Dozen*,—reveal a philosophical poet relating the pleasures of his senses in the purest prose of his time. That his work received appreciation only from a minority may have been simply the old story of the prophet denied honour in his own country, of the poet denied recognition in his own time. But it was an unfortunate fact that his genius flowered in maturity during a decade destitute of dignity and integrity, in which mediocrity and conformity were the essentials of success, while, deaf to the warning wisdom of its few clear thinkers, shiftlessly, sottishly, a nation drifted to disaster.

Llewelyn Powys had died by the time I became familiar with his lucid and graceful prose, but curiously enough I did have quite an intimate encounter with his widow, Alyse Gregory. At a time of great personal unhappiness in my own life I happened to come across a book of what seemed to me profoundly wise essays by this remarkable old lady—I cannot exactly remember the title of the book, but I shall always remember both the writings and the correspondence we exchanged—less a correspondence, more a cry for help on my part, and

**Voices*, Autumn 1946, pp. 71-75.

a marvellously calm yet helpful response on her part. What a perfect partner she must have made for Llewelyn, their Epicurean-clear minds seeming to think alike on so many matters. Put simply her advice to me would seem summed up in a phrase remarkably similar to something Henry Miller also once said—give up, *let go*, open up the prison doors, so to speak, and then you can begin living again. I put it very clumsily: Alyse Gregory did not, she wrote with exquisite precision, and I am amazed that some publisher does not re-issue her writings.

John Cowper and Llewelyn I never met—but strangely enough, their elder brother, Littleton, I did. This happened because during the editing of *Opus*, later retitled *Voices*, I received several excellent stories from Elizabeth Myers, whose work impressed me enormously (so much so that I went out of my way wherever possible to spread interest in it, and managed to include stories of hers in an anthology, *Voyage*, I edited for Sylvan Press in 1945 and also in *International Short Stories*). Soon Elizabeth and I were indulging in a voluminous correspondence—being an invalid and rather housebound she carried on many of her relationships by letter—and eventually when she knew I was coming through Sherborne, she invited me to lunch with her and Littleton. It is all a long long time ago now, but I remember clearly this rather short, demure, dark and pretty woman whose face, alas, was ravaged with signs of the illness which was clearly killing her and yet whose personality radiated a natural warmth, even vitality (certainly in literary discussion, with some very sharp

observations). Littleton, of course, was very much older, in his seventies I imagine, gentle and full of a delightful old world courtesy. I was touched by the attentive way he looked after his much younger (though sadly much iller) wife. I could well understand how Elizabeth had been drawn—deeply and lovingly drawn—to a man, who, though he never attained the same literary eminence as his more illustrious brothers, yet was stamped with that unmistakable, indeed I would imagine unique Powys quality.

Looking back over all the years it is like peeping into another world, a totally different period of time, a dying era, indeed. Although I never met any of the other Powys's, I did in fact spend a great deal of time in those days in visits to Malcom Elwin's lovely old white house at Northam, near Westward Ho (it was there that I met Henry Williamson, another unforgettable character of that period, and one who also greatly admired the Powys genius). Malcolm, of course, was a great authority—next to Louis Marlow, perhaps the greatest—on the family, and he had many fascinating anecdotes to tell. What I have written are merely a few unimportant fragments, but perhaps all these little things help to etch in the whole portrait of one of Britain's most remarkable literary families—and perhaps too, in my remarks about Alyse Gregory and Elizabeth Myers I may start a few other memories ticking over about surely a most interesting aspect of the Powys world, the influence and the personalities of some of their closest associates and devotees.

Letters to the Editor

Many readers of *The Powys Review* will be aware of the recent publication by the Enitharmon Press of the first three volumes in their Powys Series; these included the first full-length study, by Roland Mathias, of John Cowper Powys's poetry under the title *The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk: John Cowper Powys as Poet*.

As the publisher and author respectively of this book we write jointly to draw attention to the difficulties placed in the way of the publication of this critical work by the demands made by the Powys Estate, through their agent, for permission fees for quotation and by the way in which the Copyright Act is being used apparently to discourage writers of literary criticism, who must of necessity quote from the works of authors about whom they write.

For *The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk* permission was sought from Laurence Pollinger Ltd, the agent for the Powys Estate, to quote 654 lines of poetry and about 4000 words of prose from various books written by John Cowper Powys. For this Laurence Pollinger demanded £200; we both thought this exorbitant (amounting in fact to 22½% of the printing costs) and after protest by us it was reduced to £150, an amount still far in excess of what we thought reasonable, and showing an attitude on the part of the Estate and the agent completely alien to the spirit of the man in whose name it was made, both views being shared by several members of the Powys Society and relatives of the late John Cowper Powys with whom we discussed the matter.

An offer of £50 was made and rejected by Laurence Pollinger who claimed breach of copyright and threatened to report the matter to the Arts Council (as a small, non-commercial publisher the Enitharmon Press has received an annual grant from the Council). This was followed later by a letter from the agent's solicitors, again claiming breach of copyright and threatening both publisher and author with legal proceedings to obtain an injunction to restrain distribution and sale of the book, and a claim for damages and costs.

Neither of us wished nor could afford to become involved in litigation and we were left with no choice but to pay up which, under protest, we did.

What puzzles us, in addition to the discouragement which the Powys Estate has given to the writers and publishers of critical works about the Powys brothers, is the assertion of the Estate's solicitor that to publish without the Estate's consent was a breach of copyright. Yet—and here we have to rely on such abridgements of the Copyright Act as we have seen—it is quite plain that a critique of writings copyrighted is exempted from copyright *as such*. Where argument arises is over the extent of quotation from such works, an argument which centres upon the degree to which 'fair' quotation has been exceeded. C. H. Gibbs-Smith in 'Copyright Law concerning works of art . . . the written and spoken word' (Museums Association Information Sheet No. 7, p. 5, 3rd revised edition 1978) refers to a recent action in which "the Court held that as much as a fifth of a whole book was justifiable as being quoted for the purposes of criticism." He goes on to quote a statement agreed by the Publishers' Association and the Society of Authors jointly that it would not be 'un-fair' if *for purposes of criticism or review* a single extract of up to 400 words or a series of extracts (of which none exceeded 300 words) to a total of 800 words were taken from prose copyright works or extracts up to a total of 40 lines were taken from a poem, provided that not more than one quarter of the poem is used, but concludes that this is an *ex parte* promulgation which is over-cautious.

The relevance of the examples quoted to what would be 'fair' in a full-length work of criticism is obviously limited and it is no part of our intention to argue that *The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk* could have been exempted altogether from payment under the 'fair quotation' clause. But we were well aware of the 'going rate' amongst publishers and agents and it was on this basis that we felt that £50 was the maximum payment that could be justified under the Act and the practice that has grown up around it. If an agent can, by demanding excessive payment for quotation in excess of the 'fair', effectively prevent the publication of a work of criticism except on his own terms, is not that a denial of the spirit and intention of the Copyright Act?

Alan Clodd
Enitharmon Press

Roland Mathias

Editor's Comment

It is regrettable that the producers of the first book-length work of criticism on John Cowper Powys's poetry should have experienced difficulties. It must be said that the Editor of *The Powys Review* has always had cause to thank Laurence Pollinger Ltd. It seemed only fair to allow Laurence Pollinger Ltd the option of a public reply to the above letter and the following reply has been received from a Director, Gerald J. Pollinger.

"No reputable agent for authors should have the need to defend his actions on behalf of his clients; I have no doubt that Mr. Mathias' literary representative guards his client's copyrights as jealously as he should, and simultaneously promotes his client's writings to the best of his ability.

"I feel privileged in playing a major part in bringing the Powys family to the attention of a wide audience; virtue, like copyright, is not without its just reward."



Reviews

Recollections of the Powys Brothers,
Editor, BELINDA HUMFREY.

Peter Owen, 1979, £9.95.

Recollections of the Powys Brothers has a long introduction in which Belinda Humfrey interprets as well as summarizes the lives of Llewelyn, Theodore, and John Cowper Powys. She also draws the most useful comparisons and connections between their writings and their ideas that have yet been made. The general perspective is then widened by an essay on the Powys family by Alyse Gregory and reminiscences of Montacute before the First World War by Isobel Powys Marks. There follow, in three sections, recollections of the brothers in turn. Some are by famous people, some by the not publicly known, and the periods of time during which they were in touch with one or more of the brothers vary in length between a single meeting and a lifetime (there are, for example, sketches of Theodore and John Cowper by Llewelyn). Many of the contributions were written specially for this book, and the rest have been drawn from such sources as journals, manuscripts, and previously published books. I shall later quote from some of these, but since it would be impossible to write usefully about each of them here, I must just say that almost all the recollections, though varying widely in depth and perceptiveness as well as length, contribute something to the qualities that make this book more than the sum of its parts. These central sections are followed by an appendix containing two previously unpublished pieces by T. F. Powys and John Cowper Powys, in which each writes revealingly of his attitudes towards both religion and other members of the family. The book concludes with a Powys family-tree, scrupulously composed to show its far-reaching roots and branches, and a bibliography of the brothers' main writings.

With the exception of a few moments suggesting the possibility of a shocking reversal, the direction given by Belinda Humfrey in the first paragraph of her introduction is maintained throughout the book. There she writes that "the three brothers have in common their 'Powysness', a power indeed, yet each is extraordinary in his own right as a man and a writer". Thereafter "extraordinary"—does it really occur one or more times on almost every page, as it seems to?—is the commonest adjective applied to the Powys brothers, while most of the memoirs record experiences of either collective or individual Powysian "power". On the whole, therefore, this book is about legendary beings, and is almost completely innocent of the modern academic passion for demythologizing. It is all the better for that, in my opinion. For although there is a need for critical books on the Powyses as men and writers, there was also a need, which this book has fulfilled, for a collection of testimonies to this extraordinary power.

Yet discriminations are suggested and at times even directly made in this book—every member of the family evidently had this power, but some had more than others, and it could take different forms; it was there most notably in Theodore and John Cowper, and it could manifest itself in each either frighteningly or benevolently, Theodore being occasionally a much more fearfully awe-inspiring "presence", while John Cowper in age had the great power of receptivity deriving from renunciation of the power of self-imposition, which his Myrddin has.

But what is this Powysian power? Is all this talk of it a kind of mystification? No, it is not; but the power itself was, in part, an outcome of myth-making. Briefly, it was this in the sense that the Powyses in childhood, and as they grew older, lived in the stories which they told about themselves and about each other, stories that provided

them with different images of man and woman from those pinched, cramping psychic living-spaces that are the common product of the modern world. The power released was real: alien to the "reality" of man as the product of prevailing social relations and ideals, it was a realization of the greater human potential—for despair as well as ecstasy, for destruction as well as creation—embodied in the world's great stories and myths and religions.

Possibly because I had not seen it before, there is one photograph included in this book that struck home to me a feature common to the Powys brothers which almost everything written about them declares, but which is so pervasive that it may easily be overlooked. This shows Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory taking a meal in the open air at Chydyok, against the background of a flint wall, with the ground behind sloping above it. What it epitomizes is the habit, shared by themselves and encouraged by their writings, for the Powyses to be seen always in natural rather than social settings, and if indoors, then usually either surrounded by books or in simple domestic interiors, where the man's strong presence is in harmony with literary tradition and the profundities of the ancients, or with the basic goods and things befitting an everyday life of Homeric or hermetic simplicity. There is indeed something remarkable about this, when we consider both the Montacute world of "breakfast . . . preceded by family prayers, the three maids coming in for this ritual, in their striped dresses, aprons and caps", of which Isobel Powys Marks writes, and that the class origins and movements described by the careers of all other important modern English writers, from D. H. Lawrence to Virginia Woolf, have contributed far more conspicuously to the images we have of them as people. Llewelyn kept more of the gentry's manner than his brothers, but all are seen almost always in these memoirs as natural or elemental presences, and not infrequently as god-like. But as Shelley said, "man never ceases to be a social being". In the case of the Powys brothers, such was

their personal distinction and force, that few people who met them even hint at the social tensions they experienced, and with which they engaged, each in his own oblique way, in their writings. It is, however, to this engagement, to their having come from a particular social world, with attitudes and beliefs with which each had his painful creative struggle, that their writings owe much of their significance.

An intelligent study of social influences and tensions in Powys lives and letters would be a useful book to set beside *Recollections*. It might, for example, throw a coolly sceptical light on the relation between "Powysness" as a form of primitivism and the highly civilized interpreters, such as Alyse Gregory and Louis Wilkinson (and most notably John Cowper himself), who have assisted the growth of the legend. But the legend itself would survive, with the kind of power exemplified by the following incident.

Elizabeth Muntz, in "T. F. Powys: A Few Recorded Memories" (first published in *Theodore, Essays on T. F. Powys*, edited by Brocard Sewell, and included here), remembers Theodore's response to her choice of Purbeck Stone from St Aldhelm's Head quarry for her carving of his head: "'Cut,' he said proudly, 'out of one of the far hills that I look at when I walk on the cliffs'. This gave him great delight. 'To be carved out of the heart of one of those noble, ancient hills, older than time itself, *that is a great honour*,' he would say with an approving nod." Here is an image representing Powysian power: the identification of the man with the actual landforms, as elsewhere with the natural forces and phenomena, among which he lived and of which he wrote—Theodore and Llewelyn with the chalk cliffs and hills and tumuli of Dorset, John Cowper with mist and rock and water, with a world of undergrowths, in Somerset and Dorset and North Wales. It was their alternative relation to the earth, and indeed the universe, to that prevalent in the West since the seventeenth century that enabled them to

speak, not with disembodied voices, but as if from their elemental ground.

Gerard Casey as a young man, before he had met any of the brothers, felt hints “at strangenesses and depths hidden among the possibilities open to human nature”, even at the title of *A Philosophy of Solitude*. He calls his essay on Theodore and John Cowper “A Double Initiation”. Again and again in these recollections, an experience of initiation is recorded — into “the possibilities open to human nature” or—again in Gerard Casey’s words—into “unknown modes of being”. And into the simple pleasures of being alive. In all these respects the brothers fulfilled the great romantic aim of revealing the miracle of the familiar and the magic of the commonplace—itself a version of the Christian sacramental vision.

The contributors to this book naturally reveal something of themselves in writing about the Powyses. In most cases, perhaps they reveal more of themselves than their subjects. For although Llewelyn was evidently much the person he appeared to be, the essential “I am I” in the cases of Theodore and John Cowper was, just as evidently, almost completely unknowable: indeed each in his way seems to have become the power he was by unmaking the self he might have been. I mean by this to imply that John Cowper’s identification of his sadism should be taken seriously, and the life’s achievement of this “great actor” be seen as the transformation of weaknesses into strengths. Theodore on the other hand seems to have unmade his self by renouncing man’s “immortal” part, his “wanting” nature.

Although there is much agreement among the contributors about the brothers’ characters, similar evidence is of course sometimes interpreted differently by different observers. For example, the first words Harry Coombes remembers coming from John Cowper at their first meeting were “I spit at God”, while Glen Cavaliero records the following incident from a visit to John Cowper: “another angry moment came when he recalled Cowper’s dying words,

‘Absolute despair’. ‘I could spit at God for that!’”. It seems highly likely that a similar if not identical provocation of generous indignation produced the exclamation Harry Coombes remembers, but its arbitrariness accords with the eccentricity of Powys that his account of him rather suggests. Harry Coombes nevertheless offers a friendly tribute, which does him the more credit in view of his poor opinion of John Cowper as a writer. I do not wish to suggest that his recollection is at all dishonest; only that what he remembers in this instance tells us much less about Powys than about his overall view of him. For a different reason, Jack Clemo writing of his visit to Theodore at Mappowder reveals more of himself, but most of the contributors are self-effacing and receptive. They are impressed and even awed, too, so that the few really critical comments in the book are actually shocking.

It is interesting and perhaps significant that the two most critical observations are both made in relation to Theodore by strong-minded, sophisticated women. According to Alyse Gregory in her journal, he had “extreme dependence on and supreme contempt for Violet and Susie” (his wife and adopted daughter); which, if true, would make a savage mockery of his “kindness”. Mark Holloway, however, whose essay—one of the best in the book—follows the journal extracts, saw Theodore and Violet quite differently. He gives a warmly sympathetic appreciation of her, and observes that some of their friends and acquaintances “had towards Violet an attitude that was almost condescending”. It would not be surprising if the very qualities of culture, stoicism, self-containment, and independence of spirit, apparent in most of her writings here, and supremely in *The Cry of a Gull*, had made Alyse Gregory superior and imperceptive about Theodore’s marriage. What are we to make, though, of a psychological portrait by Sylvia Townsend Warner, in a piece written after Theodore’s death and included here following extracts from her much earlier, sympathetic recollections of him? Here she expresses her

belief that “a psychoanalyst would have found out that he was an impacted adolescent, simultaneously entranced and horrified at feeling so many irreconcilable things at once, and all so violently”. Her brief analysis is brilliant, but far too clever to be true. It is characteristic not only of the dominant spirit of this book but also, I believe, of the attitudes that arise from a sympathetic reading of the Powyses, in fact, from being educated by them, that the idea of any of them being “found out” by a psychoanalyst is laughably alien. Which is not to say that the condescension evident in different ways and to different degrees in their writing about women does not deserve a rough kind of justice.

Enlargement of being; this, in one way or another, is what most of the contributors to this book show to have been the result of their experience of “Powysness”. No wonder Kenneth Hopkins should write, “it is no small thing for a man to say he knew Llewelyn Powys, and to me it is a great one”. Most of the memoirs collected here convey the same sentiment with regard to one or more of the brothers. This is one large reason why the book gives so much pleasure, for expressions of merited honour, and of wholehearted gratitude and love are rare enough nowadays. And this is an anthology of them.

JEREMY HOOKER

The Life of D. H. Lawrence: An Illustrated Biography,
KEITH SAGAR.

Eyre Methuen, 1980, £9.95.

There is no life that can be recaptured wholly: as it was. Which is to say that all biography is ultimately fiction.

That is William Dubin’s problem in Malamud’s *Dubin’s Lives*: and Dubin is about to embark on a biography of Lawrence.

There are few better books about biography than *Dubin’s Lives*, and it is not simply *parti pris* which leads Malamud to the comparison with fiction. He also quotes Freud:

Anyone turning biographer has committed himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to flattery, and even to hiding his own lack of understanding: for biographical truth is not to be had, and even if it were it couldn’t be useful.

For Freud, biography is “ultimately fiction” because it has no relation with the truth, or truths, of a life. For Malamud—or at least for Dubin—the idea of fiction is a liberation. The biographer cannot know the truth of a life, even of his own: but, in this particular case, he has chosen to invent it. A biographer *makes* a biography, he doesn’t simply find it lurking in his sources. That is what, of course, is really wrong with biographies like Carlos Baker’s *Hemingway*: Baker implicitly believes that, if he has the facts right, and enough of them, then the biography (and the biographed) will inevitably emerge. We find out what Hemingway’s first dolls were: a rubber papoose and a white Eskimo. Does the childhood emerge? Dubin (and Freud) grasp that a biography is a creation for which a good analogy is fiction: biography is *made* life, not *found* life.

Keith Sagar’s *The Life of D. H. Lawrence* has some real advantages. William Dubin has found (lucky man) undiscovered letters from Lawrence to his mother: Keith Sagar has uncovered photographic evidence of extreme interest. He prints the first photograph of Lawrence’s mother that is not blurred or faded or distanced: tucked away at the bottom of a page, that bright-eyed gaze beneath the high forehead is instantly recognizable. It’s only a pity the reproduction is so small: Compton Mackenzie gets a two-page spread to himself. There’s another fascinating photograph of Lawrence’s father “in retirement at Ripley”—and, again, the squat, bulbous nose is immediately identifiable. There is a photograph of Lawrence

and Frieda together early on, before Lawrence grew his beard—one of the relatively few unposed early photographs: inevitably, the early photographs of both Lawrence and Frieda are mostly the products of studios. There are later photographs of Lawrence the indulgent uncle, Lawrence as Pan, and as a bishop in a paper mitre; and there are some unpublished photographs by Dorothy Brett, taken on the ranch and in Oaxaca in 1924 and 1925. (There is also a wonderful picture of Brett herself in cowboy costume, with an appalled man in the background holding his head in his hands.) It's good to have a colour reproduction of Lawrence's 1926 painting "Boccaccio Story": and the 1915 dustjacket for *The Rainbow* is reproduced, with its hero straight-backed, hook-nosed and be-waistcoated: the gentleman farmer in his barn, with his woman swooning at his feet—and him old enough to be her father. The book's first readers must have been staggered to find *The Rainbow* inside that piece of nonsense.

But the book is more than a picture-book: it is a biography that has to make a life, however much is usefully found in its photographs. Its shape is, in general, very much that of Dr Sagar's earlier book *The Art of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge, 1966): Lawrence creates his greatest art early in the war, *The Rainbow* is "undoubtedly the finest novel of its time"—but *Women in Love* marks the beginning of Lawrence's "misanthropic years", his loss of "a deep belief in human relationships and potentialities". He returns to creativity in *Lady Chatterley* and *Etruscan Places*. Implicit in this shape for his biography are two assumptions which Dr Sagar has no space to argue through—that Lawrence's writing between 1917 and 1926 is deeply damaged by his loss of that "deep belief", and that the early writing naturally culminates in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Neither assumption may, in fact, be true. Lawrence's writing in the 'twenties certainly took a different course from what he had done before, as his own life took a different course—but that is perhaps the point: he rarely

repeated himself. And what he set himself to write about, particularly out of his American experiences, was something his whole life, and whole writing career, had been working towards. Again, in his critical writing (almost non-existent before 1917), in his popular essays (another new development), in his animal poetry, in a great many of his short stories, in the experimental novels he wrote, there is evidence of a great broadening and also clarifying in his creative writing. On the other hand, when he came to write *Lady Chatterley*, we are made very much aware of the dislocation from his own origins and his own sense of England which the very ambition of the novel highlights so painfully.

Furthermore, it is the limitation of Dr Sagar as a biographer that in spite of his great range of reference, and intimate knowledge, he makes the changes in Lawrence's writing-life very much a reflection of inner and psychological pressures like "misanthropy": when perhaps the most striking thing about Lawrence's life was the way his writing encountered (and met) the very problems and issues which have since dominated the life of the West: the cultural dislocation, the desire for alternative communities, the division between conservatism and liberalism, the belief in sexual regeneration, the assertion of primitivism and religious consciousness. In his investigation of these things, the life and work of Lawrence are a paradigm of the English experience this century; the fact that he was so wonderfully articulate about them—even when he did not understand them, or even recognize them—is what gives his writing (and his career) its cardinal and seminal importance. By 1930, Lawrence had experienced a great deal that the rest of us are still in the grip of. *The Life of D. H. Lawrence* is unambitious as biography in that it assumes an old critical shape (a modification of Leavis's work of the 'fifties), and is most interested in its hero for his personal or psychological traumas. It is also concerned to present a culture-hero rather than a man of divided experience. For Dr Sagar, the important

thing in the end is that—after a period of wandering—Lawrence came back to himself, and back to us: our response to his life should be to move closer to his ideals. Dr Sagar's biographical shape is itself in danger of being a cliché, because it has no clear sense of the significance of wanting such a return, or such ideals. The book is a better single-volume biography than any other we have: Moore's *Priest of Love* is turgid and ponderous, and the earlier attempts at biography through reminiscence are only interesting in details. But this new book does not search out why Lawrence's life is of importance to us: it is primarily an illustration of a life. It is not, ultimately, creative of its own fiction: it does not *make* a life.

A few errors in the book are worth noting. The population of Eastwood in 1885 was about 4,300, not about 3,000 (p. 7); the gamekeeper Annable was not added to *The White Peacock* "at a late stage" (p. 49)—he was there from 1907; Ciccio, in *The Lost Girl*, is not a "circus performer" but a member of a music-hall troupe—and the heroine of the 1913 version of the book was not Alvina, but Anna, Houghton (p. 62); the money Lawrence used to send to Maurice Magnus early in 1920 did not come from Amy Lowell, but from the American publisher B. W. Huebsch (p. 117); the James Tait Black prize won by *The Lost Girl* was not awarded by Rachel Annand Taylor (p. 122), but by the Professor of English at the University of Edinburgh, H. J. Grierson.

JOHN WORTHEN

American Popular Entertainment: Papers and Proceedings of the Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment (Lincoln Center, 1977),
Editor, MYRON MATLAW.

Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn.;
London, 1979, £14.95.

Almost a century ago, in San Francisco, in another presidential election year, Joe

Weber and Lew Fields as the slow-witted Mike and the agile-minded Meyer, argued over the outcome of the election in their Double Dutch act. How could Meyer, for all his wit, "no politickaler", know that Harrison would beat Cleveland "in der elegshion"? Simple. "Evverywhere ve shtopped, der vere der panners zaying Harrizon, Harrizon, Harrizon. Efferywhere der panners—Harrizon." As Paul Distler tells it in his paper to the 1977 Conference on the History of American Popular Entertainment, the unfortunate Mike "gleams with the visions of imminent victory within grasp":

"Yah, der vere panners for Harrizon, Meyer; panners vere efferywhere for him. Budt, panners dondt vote".

But the wily Meyer "smiles with wicked disdain and delivers the *coup de grace*":

"Shure, panners dondt vote. Budt, dey shure do show vich vay der windt is plowing" (pp. 33-34).

It is a turn of events worthy of Falstaff and in direct line with his "was it for me to kill the heir-apparent?". And Falstaff, it will be remembered, went on to explain that upon instinct he was a coward and therefore ran away: "Should I turn upon the true prince?". Beware instinct he says, "Instinct is a great matter".

We must, of course, also beware of taking advice from Falstaff, that Grey Iniquity, that Villainous and Abominable Misleader of Academicus, yet it would seem that until quite recently the instinctual pleasures of vaudeville and music hall, low ethnic comedy and the pantomime, stump speech and medicine pitch, have been puritanically disdained in academic and high mandarin criticism, and even by many a department of drama. To be fair, it is not difficult to see why. The bad pun sorts ill with the subtle use of language, and quite as troublesome to the serious-minded is the problem posed by "mere fun", and, still worse (and even actually immoral), from that derived from the ethnic joke. *Pace*

Fluellen and Francischina! As a colleague at the University of Birmingham warned me a dozen years ago as we were about to illustrate a lecture with a succession of music-hall cross-talk acts to an audience mainly composed of electrical engineers, "We'll never get on, you know, we enjoy it too much".

If the academy has, with a few exceptions, steered clear of the iniquities of popular entertainment, creative artists have certainly not. Dickens, Kipling, O'Casey, T. S. Eliot—not to mention Shakespeare—certainly found inspiration in the popular arts. (And it should be noted that it is reputedly to the credit of an academic, C. J. Sisson, that T. S. Eliot was introduced to the English music hall—"When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said . . ."—and Eliot is appealed to, if with some reservation, in Professor Browne's summing-up, pp. 293-94.) It is also plain from his *Autobiography* that John Cowper Powys was familiar with, and enjoyed, certain manifestations of popular culture. It is not easy to imagine him revelling in the pages of *Ally Sloper* (470¹), but his discussion of his lecture tour of America is convincingly described in terms which show a lively awareness of this academically neglected field. Chaplin, describing to Powys "a certain ideal performance", is called "this great genius" (517); Powys sees himself, with "humorous detachment", as "a mixture of a comic Dan Leno and a prophetic Savonarola" (448-49); he and his manager, G. Arnold Shaw, Powys describes as "a fair pair": "I was the clown of our circus, and Arnold was the ringmaster" (447). In regarding the tour as "a public entertainment", and in resisting the temptation to make it a "cultural stunt" (448), they were, surely, very close to one aspect of that peculiarly American tradition, the chautauqua. (The chautauqua was not featured at the con-

ference though the bibliography lists two or three relevant books on this topic.)

If melodrama, showboats, and the chautauqua did not gain a hearing, and there are only passing references to Tomming, much other ground was covered. There were twenty-five papers; nine were on minstrel shows, vaudeville and burlesque; three on tent repertoire; five on the circus; three on dance; two on what is chicly called "Environmental Entertainment"—amusement and theme parks (such as Disneyland); a couple provided introductory overviews and there were some concluding remarks. A short bibliography, reprinted from the journal *Choice*, was distributed to all attending before the conference started and it is reprinted here. It has now been very greatly expanded by its compiler, Don Wilmeth, in his admirable Gale Research volume, *American and English Popular Entertainment* (Detroit, 1980).

The contributors are an interesting mixture of academics and professional entertainers with a sprinkling of journalists, museum curators, and theatre critics. All but two are from the United States, the exceptions being George Speaight (who writes on the origin of the circus parade wagon), and Denis Gontard, Director of L'Institut d'Études Théâtrales, Montpellier, who describes and illustrates the Theatre Western (*High Noon* metamorphosed) of Marseilles. This combination produces some intriguing results. The Professor of Theatre at the University of Tennessee unashamedly (and rightly) offers what amounts to a mini-burlesque show, packed with cross-talk acts and patter under the title, "At My Mother's Knee (and Other Low Joints)". Did he also sing, I wonder? This was followed by a foursome (a fivesome counting the music "Professor") from the world of entertainment, one of whom was Morton Mirsky, the last survivor of the family that once controlled the burlesque industry in America. This offered reminiscences and skits with, as an interlude, an exotic. An "exotic? An exotic, yah. A belly dancer . . . *Miss Treiber does*

¹Page references without the prefix "p." are to John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (John Lane, London, 1934); those with a "p." are to the volume under review.

the belly dance" (p. 67). And to think that it is less than a decade since the words of Fragon's "The Music-Hall Shakespeare", which I had sung as part of a paper parodying certain Shakespeare scholarship at a Canadian conference, were expunged from the printed record as improper! As Falstaff warned, "Beware instinct!"

The papers offered a wide variety of approaches. Some are packed with excerpts; others are descriptive, or historical, or offer sociological analysis. There was a full-scale, popular-entertainment Happening to get the conference off to a good start. A very interesting account of medicine-show life was illustrated by a great many slides, though only a few fascinating drawings remain to suggest what has, perforce, had to be excluded, and two films were shown, *Toby and the Tall Corn* and *Yes Sir, Mr Bones*. One paper gives the text of most of a medicine pitch and another is preceded by a full Dr Kronkhite sketch and is illustrated by a picture of the original act taken in 1917. What strikes one, even from the cold print and the rather dully reproduced illustrations, is how lively and full of interest is the subject (or, are the subjects) of the conference. A purist might object to the variety of styles—over-informality of presentation alongside the traditional academic style, or the omission of references to slides in Mrs Noell's paper but their inclusion in that on "Modern Burlesque", complete with every "next, please":

Next, please. Backstage—(this is by Vanveen). You notice the panties on the girls: they never disrobed completely. Next, please. These are typical rules: no spitting on stage, no relatives, no dogs, and no ad-libbed dialogues without permission. (That's a warning that Joey Faye is coming on soon.) Next, please (p. 64).

The result is not, however, displeasing for one senses both the joy of the performers, professional or academic, and the enthusiasm of everyone involved. Tighter editorial control would have produced a much smoother volume but something vital would have gone. A list of illustrations

would have been an asset, as would a fuller index.

What would John Cowper Powys have made of it? He might well have enjoyed these reminders of what he called America's "grand vent and outlet for the repressions of a puritanical public opinion": the burlesque shows (474). He might still be as astounded as he was before The Great War by the brutality of the ethnic jokes (474); he would doubtless still find startling "rags and crutches and the gibberings of idiocy *made sport of*" (475). He would certainly have sensed from several of these papers how it was that American burlesque represented for him "the only art of the stage, if it *be* an art, from which I have got thrilling delight" (476). But it might have been Professor Emeritus Monroe Lippman's "Notes from an Old Girl Watcher"—a title that surely demands a judiciously placed hyphen—that best prompted Powys's memories. Lippman, in his brief overview of popular entertainment, recalls that he "soon discovered that watching just any girl was not nearly as rewarding as watching special girls" (p. 8). Powys, it will be recalled, offers a parallel to this tantamount to an epiphany:

Once, however, I recollect observing one girl, in some interlude when their rapid movement had a breathing-space, quietly take a comb from her hair and proceed to comb her tresses as nonchalantly as if she had been alone before a mirror! It was this kind of little natural gesture that, in moments of memory, would always return to melt my bones. I would say to myself, at such times:

"How *can* this be sinister and dark and wicked, when the thrill I get is so full of an enchanting, irresistible sweetness?" (477).

Oh Falstaff! Oh Instinct! Down wantons, down!, as the cockney did to the eels when she put 'em i' the paste alive . . .

In Britain and America attention has, in the past decade, been increasingly turning to the riches of nineteenth-century theatre, and outstanding in that theatre was popular entertainment. This batch of papers will help on that worthwhile and most enjoyable

study. Now that conferences have been held in both countries on popular entertainment with such fruitful results, perhaps the benefits to be realized from a joint sharing of information and experience might be sought.

PETER DAVISON

The Myth Makers,
V. S. PRITCHETT.

Chatto and Windus, 1979, £5.95.

The Myth Makers is a collection of essays on novelists who do not write in English. Seven Russian and five French writers, Strindberg and Kafka, one Portuguese, one Spaniard and three Latin Americans make up this patchwork quilt. The penultimate essay, on Marquez, is in fact entitled "The Myth Makers", and except in this essay and perhaps in the interesting investigation of the fables of Borges which follows there is not much discussion of myth. On the other hand Sir Victor Pritchett is due to produce in 1980 a volume entitled *The Tale Bearers*, a collection of essays on English and American novelists, and the title *The Myth Makers* does show how novelists writing outside the Anglo-Saxon tradition are more concerned with cosmic truths than with realism or entertainment.

The essays have been collected over twenty-five years. Some essays are really reviews of important studies of individual novelists such as Troyat's life of Tolstoy. Others are general introductions to the work of an author. Some of these authors are hardly likely to be well known: the Portuguese Eça de Queiroz and the Brazilian Machado de Assis are identified as obscure by their Christian names being given at the head of the chapter. There is no index, but a modest though up-to-date bibliography gives two or three modern works on each author.

As a master of the short story Pritchett finds little difficulty in making each of his short essays interesting, and it does not

seem to matter that Tolstoy is so much better known than Assis, that Dostoevsky wrote so much more than Goncharov, or that a review of Hemmings's *Life of Zola* is very different from a general survey of George Sand's work. Occasionally we find Pritchett repeating himself: he twice tells us that he does not know Russian, and twice that the Russians are prudish. In general each novelist is discussed in isolation, although there are some useful reminders of the influence of other writers on Dostoevsky, and of Sterne on Pushkin, of Swift on Kafka and of Stendhal on Queiroz. The book ends with what Pritchett coyly calls a bookish comment on parallels between Mérimée and Borges, and the chapter on Tolstoy begins with the memorable sentence "the life of Tolstoy is a novel that might have been written by Asakov in its beginning, by Gogol in the middle and by Dostoevsky in the years following the conversion". It is rather disappointing not to have essays on Mérimée or Asakov or Gogol after our appetite has been whetted in this way.

There is a strong and unfashionable biographical streak in almost all the essays; even those on George Sand and Genet exhibit an old-fashioned disapproval of the irregularities in their subjects' lives, although it is not the life of these authors that is being discussed, as it is in the case of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Zola. The sentence about the life of Tolstoy gives us one reason why the lives of novelists are worth studying and the other essays provide plenty more. Critics who like to escape from the biographical heresy by imagining all novelists writing in a kind of limbo in which Tolstoy lives much the same life as Jane Austen do no service to themselves or the authors they are discussing. Many amateur readers of *Oblomov* may imagine the author of the novel to have been a character like his hero, and many professional students of Goncharov will know that he led the life of a rigid and unimaginative bureaucrat, and thus be able to point out the fallacies of equating biography with criticism. In one of the best of his essays

Pritchett is able to point out deftly that the amateur is less wrong than the professional.

Pritchett wears his learning lightly, and although clearly at home in French and Russian literary history is able to make the lives and backgrounds of his novelists clear to those readers not so fortunately placed without labouring the obvious. His lack of knowledge of Russian may put off the purist, although it is difficult to see any difference in quality between essays where the author reads a novel in the original and where, like most of us, he reads it in translation. There are some interesting remarks on translation in the essays on Pasternak and George Sand; but Pritchett does not expand, as he is unusually qualified to do, on why Russian literature is more easily approached in translation than French literature. There is a problem here, and it cannot be solved simply by saying that more people know French than Russian.

A knowledge of the original is of course necessary for close study of symbolism and imagery and Pritchett does not have time for this or much time for critics who "may find too much in the text and build top-heavy theories on images and symbols". It is only, and perhaps naturally, in a discussion of Flaubert that Pritchett gets to grips with this kind of criticism and this kind of critic, represented by Victor Brombert who wrote *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques*. In general Brombert is praised for his insights, but his style is not praised. Critics ought to be craftsmen with words, but a critic who can write "lupanar" for "pertaining to a brothel" or "obnuvilate" for "dim" ought to be learning from, not writing about, Flaubert's style.

Sir Victor Pritchett is a craftsman with words, and he can show this in a positive way. When he says of Dostoevsky that "life-stories of infinite complexity hang shamelessly out of the mouths of his characters, like dogs' tongues as they run by", it is the simile as much as the insight that shows us that we are reading a great critic. This is a book which should be read not only by students of the novel and by people who are

interested in these particular novelists, but also by those who aspire to any form of literary criticism. A critic does not have to be dull in order to prove himself learned, he does not have to be eccentric in order to be original, and he is more likely to reach his audience if he writes in plain English without "opening an intellectual hardware store".

T. J. WINNIFRITH

The Older Hardy,
ROBERT GITTINGS.

Heinemann, 1978, £6.95.

The value of literary—or any kind of artistic—biography is questionable. To say that Rembrandt went bankrupt or even that Beethoven went deaf tells us nothing about what they *were* and very little about their art. As W. H. Auden put it:

In the case of a man of action—a ruler, a statesman, a general—the man is identical with his biography. In the case of any kind of artist, however, who is a maker not a doer, his biography, the story of his life, and the history of his works are distinct.

Most literary biographers, nevertheless, and in particular the great ones, Boswell, Lockhart, Mrs Gaskell for instance, are animated by admiration and affection for their subject as a person, and very often as a friend whom they knew, and show a sense of the unity of his life and work. They understand the difference between life and art and where the borderlines between them lie, but try to bring the two together into a single perspective. The modern literary-biographical detective who ferrets out the life-secrets of a subject he never knew, by arduous and painstaking research, is in quite another relation to him. He may as well be an enemy as a friend. He may well be more concerned with his own reputation than with his subject's. Dr Robert Gittings's biography *The Older Hardy* is, as *Young Thomas Hardy* also was, animated

by an evident and, considering his lack of personal acquaintance, surprisingly intense dislike of Hardy the man and by a desire to demonstrate, but not to explain, the incompatibility between the disagreeableness of Hardy's character as Dr Gittings conceives of it and the tender compassion, the searching poignancy and the perplexed irony which he admits are found in the work. He exaggerates greatly the extent to which the subject-matter of all Hardy's writings in prose and verse is drawn directly from biographical events. For instance, in Chapter 5, "The Original Tess", he certainly shows that the germ of the novel is contained in parts of the life-story of Mary Head, Hardy's paternal grandmother. She had an illegitimate child and she "spent nearly three months under fear of death by hanging" in prison. But she went on to lead a satisfactory and apparently happy life and to be immortalized far more faithfully in a splendid poem, "One We Knew", than in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. She did not discover an ancient and decayed ancestry, she did not bring about the death of Prince, she never met an Alec d'Urberville nor an Angel Clare, she did not work at Talbothays nor at Flintcomb-Ash, she was not apprehended at Stonehenge and the President of the Immortals allowed her to die in her bed at a ripe old age. And the crime for which she was held under the fear of death by hanging was the crime of "having feloniously stolen a copper teakettle". The significant things about Tess are the product of Hardy's imagination, not of Mary Head's life. The fact that she was his source tells us even less about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* than the fact that Greene's *Pandosto* was the source of *The Winter's Tale*. But Dr Gittings has researched it all and thinks it important to tell us much about the larceny laws at the end of the eighteenth century into the bargain.

But he does not, as I have said, attempt to explain how literary art which he recognizes as imposing can have issued from a mind and soul so petty and nugatory as he represents Hardy's to have been. He is far too adroit and accomplished a

disparager to declare that this is his view of the man. He sheds many crocodile tears over the difficulties Hardy had with his own "self-centred" (as Dr Gittings has it) temperament, with both his marriages and with the various other misfortunes with which life presented him. He contrives to give the impression that misfortune and misery were far more dominant in Hardy's life, and that he was far less able to support them, than I believe to have been the case. *The Older Hardy* is one of the most brilliantly executed and scrupulously documented pieces of character assassination in literary biography.

Dr Gittings's scholarship is indefatigable and irrefutable. In all his sixteen chapters and seven hundred and fifty odd references there are not more than at most half a dozen facts that are open to question though there are a great many interpretations that are unacceptable. He has sifted every conceivable written record of Hardy's life and every surviving piece of oral tradition with the strictest conscientiousness. He has cast his net much wider than any of Hardy's previous, and already far too many, biographers and can certainly claim for his book that it gives quite a new representation of his personality. Hardy wrote, in the *Life*, of the human experience as "the progress of mortals through a world not worthy of them" but despite his insistence on the unhappiness of Hardy's life, Dr Gittings seems to think that he was not worthy of what the world had to offer him and in particular of the affection and attention of the two women whom he successively married. Throughout the book Hardy is shown to have been an unpleasant and disagreeable man, dominated by a self-protective and egotistical shyness, evasive and mendacious about the not very exalted social position of his parents (though this is not reconciled with what we are told in another part of the book—that his parental home was the centre of his emotional preoccupations throughout life and formed the keystone of a private mythology which sustained most of his later and greatest poetry). He was so

ashamed of the lowly and menial lives of many of his ancestors and collaterals that he greatly distorted information about the former and ruthlessly and woundingly cut and avoided the latter. He was epideictic about his self-taught culture and knowledge both in his writing and in his talk; snobbish both intellectually and socially. He was deceitful in the composition of his autobiography (the *Life* which he wished to be attributed to F. E. Hardy), which is represented as a guilty conspiracy between Hardy and his second wife. He was mean and stingy about money even when a very rich man. He was bedevilled to the end of his life by a roving eye and sexual fantasies which he did not act out. He was obsessional in all his thoughts and feelings. The words "obsession", "obsessive" or "obsessional" occur on at least every tenth page of the book from the foreword onwards. He was harsh, inconsiderate, insensitive and demanding in his marital relations in two marriages. Dr Gittings chronicles the darker aspects of both in the greatest possible detail. We learn, however, very little about Hardy's art or the quality of *Poems of 1912-13* from his comment on the end of the first marriage: "the terrible conclusion is that Hardy shut his own eyes to his wife's state, and tried to shut the eyes of others after her death". Dangerous as it is to take sides in a failed and continually deteriorating marriage, Dr Gittings takes Emma's side consistently and minimizes the anguish Emma may have inflicted on Hardy. He brings out more fully the neurotic elements in Florence Dugdale but insists that the overshadowing presence of the first wife in the second marriage—the "late espoused saint" as Florence said, who "was a fiction but a fiction in whom the author (of *Poems of 1912-13*) has now come to believe"—was the nigger in the woodpile.

Finally, "the oldest Hardy", the serene and fulfilled octogenarian of Max Gate, described preeminently by Virginia Woolf in *A Writer's Diary* but also by many other visitors in the last years is all spoof laid on by Hardy to protect his public image. In fact the tensions of their relation (Hardy's

and Florence's), their shared terror lest their clandestine association during Emma's lifetime might become public property, and Hardy's gloomy attitude to existence made the situation intolerable. Dr Gittings quotes a clever little poem by Siegfried Sassoon, "Max Gate", to show that the serene octogenarian was all play-acting but omits to mention some very warm, touching and heartfelt references by Sassoon in his letters (Viola Meynell, ed., *Friends of a Lifetime* and *The Best of Friends*) to the unique privilege and joy of visiting the aged Hardy and hearing him read his poems.

Dr Gittings makes a great point of the statement by Hardy's friend Edward Clodd that Hardy "was a great author: he was not a great man; there was no largeness of soul" and quotes it in two separate places. Clodd is described as "genial" and as "having a reputation for loyalty and generosity". Maybe he was, as we are asked to believe, an admirable man, but if what he said be accepted as true, Hardy was unique in more ways than in just being a great writer; he was a unique contradiction in terms. I can think of no artist who has attained to what is rather loosely called "greatness" in his art and who was yet demonstrably a small-minded, small-souled man. I don't for a moment believe that Hardy was. The creator of *Tess*, of *Poems of 1912-13* and of that great-souled, mixed-up character Michael Henchard could not have been. Dr Gittings's reliance upon this curious and incredible remark, his uncritical acceptance of its veracity, shakes one's confidence in his ability to interpret so complex and enigmatic a character as Hardy in spite of his great parade of irrefutable and generally discreditable facts about his life.

So does his inability to understand or illuminate one of the most important aspects of Hardy's experience and one where art and life interact most powerfully—his experience of religious belief and disbelief:

Hardy was a thorough-going rationalist of a really rather old-fashioned sort, the kind of self-taught critical unbeliever of the mid-nineteenth-century stamp. G. K. Chesterton

noted at this time that Hardy defended his views "with the innocence of a boys' debating club" . . . His childhood religion, which he had abandoned with such pain in his middle twenties, had left him just as dogmatic about agnostic unbelief as he would have been about belief. To him, religious orthodoxy was something as horrifying as its agnostic opposite would have been to a conventional Christian.

It is not easy to see how such a statement can be true of the writer of so many haunting poems about the deprivation inflicted by the inability to believe—"The Imprecipient" for example, "A Plaint to Man", "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds" or "God's Funeral". How can it be reconciled with the odd, very late poems "The Absolute Explains" and "So Time"? How with Hardy's lifelong, agonized, inconsistent search for something in which he *could* believe in a religious way? How with the baffling but certainly not old-fashioned rationalist content of "He Resolves to Say No More"? Hardy counted many churchmen among his respected friends, and he went on attending the services of a religion he had formally discarded to the end of his days. As late as the "Apology" to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* he proclaimed the necessity of retaining a church he did not believe in if civilized life and society were to survive. Hardy's attitudes to established Christianity and to the possible existence of some hitherto undiscovered spiritual principle in the cosmos were self-contradictory, often illogical and always inconclusive, but they were not as Dr Gittings describes them.

If he can get this important question as wrong as he does, it is possible to think, as I do in the face of all his imposing fabric of evidence, that much of the rest of his controversial, certainly original and mainly derogatory interpretation of Hardy's personality may have similar faults. Dr Gittings makes an incontrovertible case which it is quite impossible to accept as true. One is left in the admittedly unsatisfactory position of Troilus at the end of *Troilus and Cressida*, quite unable to believe the truth

that has been conclusively proved before one's eyes. "This he? No; this is Gittings's Hardy." There is the same discrepancy between Dr Gittings's illustration 14—admittedly a real-life photograph, not something so suspect as a work of art—and the frontispiece which shows us how Augustus John saw this same man at this same time. The former is of a tottery and tetchy little man with a weak and querulous mouth, obviously bad tempered and ill at ease. This is Gittings's Hardy. The latter has the gaunt majestic face, the hawk's beak of a nose, the huge domed brow, the "hawk's vision" in the perplexed, penetrating compassionate eyes. The camera, it is said, cannot lie. Dr Gittings is supremely confident that he cannot. For myself, I back the artist against the camera or the biographical researcher. The picture is a sketch for the John oil painting of Hardy in extreme old age, the picture of which Hardy said that he didn't know if that was how he looked but it was exactly how he felt.

Dr Gittings gives the show away in his concluding paragraph, for nothing but a desire to denigrate his subject could induce a writer to end on such a note. Kate, Hardy's youngest sister, Dr Gittings tells us,

returning to Talbothays from the opening on 10 May 1939, of the reconstruction of Hardy's study in the Dorset County Museum . . . threw down her bonnet on the sofa, laughed heartily, and referring to the complimentary speakers, exclaimed, "If they only knew!"

A snide ending to a snide book. He might have used Gertrude Bugler's epitaph, written in 1964: "Thomas Hardy . . . to us . . . was not the grim, cynical man often pictured and, if he sometimes emphasized the darker side of life, he never forgot the sunshine of laughter . . . I can still hear him laugh".

T. R. M. CREIGHTON

Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf,
PHYLLIS ROSE.

Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, £2.95 (paper).

The title of Phyllis Rose's life of Virginia Woolf, *Woman of Letters*, draws attention to the fact that her correspondence, memoirs and essays, in addition to her novels, are of importance, and can be drawn upon to reconstruct Virginia Woolf's personal mythology, her "symbolic landscape". This notion, that the writer's life can be seen as a creation, or a work of fiction, is one of the guiding ideas behind the writing of this book. Professor Rose claims that both of the major types of approach to Virginia Woolf's work, the formalist and the biographical, have limitations. An analysis which concentrates upon form can become something like the reduction of Mr Ramsay's philosophical work to "subject and object and the nature of reality". And although Professor Rose acknowledges her indebtedness to Quentin Bell's biography, she believes that it gives an impression of Virginia Woolf which is unduly unhealthy because it fails to give sufficient weight to what was, after all, the most important part of her life, her actual writing. By identifying the emotional and intellectual centre of Virginia Woolf's life as her feminist outlook, it is argued that this false division between life and works can be rectified. The reader should not be alarmed or deterred by Professor Rose's claim in her preface that she intends to "examine the dynamics of a miracle" (p. xvi), for she achieves, in fact, something far more down-to-earth.

At the beginning of an account of Virginia Woolf's childhood we are reminded that "it is hard to overemphasize the repressive force of the world Virginia Woolf was born into" (p.4). There follows a description of furtive sexual advances made to her by her half-brothers. The narrative depends heavily upon Virginia Woolf's own accounts (which are acknowledged to be inconsistent). Professor Rose discusses the way in which Virginia Woolf saw her life in

terms of myths, and states that "rigid boundaries between one part of reality and another are abhorrent to her" (p. 16). This feeling seems to be shared by her biographer, who proceeds by interweaving facts, myths and fictions. There is an uncertain focus—as in some of Virginia Woolf's fictional works, the point of view hovers around the central character, shifting imperceptibly.

The method has its advantages. The Cambridge origin of the Bloomsbury Group would be simply inert "background" or anecdote if it were not related to Virginia Woolf's writings. Professor Rose makes this connection admirably in her chapter on *The Voyage Out*, in which she shows that Virginia Woolf's response to the clever young men whom she met through her brothers was not a passive one. The biographical material and the fiction are mutually illuminating. So, we see in its real context, the way in which Rachel comes to accept Hewet's amused reaction to Hirst. The sense that *The Voyage Out* "explores with vigor the issues raised by Woolf's limited experience" (p. 52) leads Professor Rose to feel that the "journey motif" is simply unnecessary, and she asks, pertinently, why Rachel should sail to South America to find a young man from Cambridge. Her answer is illuminating—that at this point Virginia Woolf was heavily influenced by her reading, and particularly by her reading of Conrad. A judicious contrast between the lame love-scenes and the powerful evocation of Rachel's illness is supported by apt quotation and incisive commentary:

The scene in which the lovers in *The Voyage Out* declare their love is eerily silent—the few words Terence utters are echoed by Rachel, giving the effect of someone talking to himself in a cavernous room:

"'We are happy together.' He did not seem to be speaking or she to be hearing.

'Very happy,' she answered.

They continued to walk for some time in silence. Their steps unconsciously quickened.

'We love each other,' Terence said.

'We love each other,' she repeated."

The discussion of the depiction of Rachel's delirium is excellent and goes beyond the usual comment that these scenes are successful because founded upon Virginia Woolf's own experience:

It is not just that she has had the experience of delirium and knows it well but that she is convinced it is interesting. She needn't strain to heighten it. In madness she had transcended the limitations of a housebound young lady's experience, and she valued this about it. (p. 72)

The chapter "Transitions and Experiments" dealing with the years which saw the publication of *Night and Day* and *Jacob's Room*, contains an attempt to explore Virginia Woolf's idea of "masculine" and "feminine" novels. A sense of authority, of moral certainty, and the use of omniscient narration are seen as "masculine". By drawing on the work of a psychologist who claims that men prefer closed, and women open, geometrical shapes, Professor Rose argues that the "open endings" of many twentieth-century novels are part of the "feminization" of fiction. But having previously stated that this psychological theory is "certainly not offered here as truth" (p. 101) it seems strange to invoke it either to support her idea about the feminization of fiction or as evidence in favour of her speculation about why Virginia Woolf thought of the form of the novel in sexual terms. Certainly, she gives no evidence that Virginia Woolf thought specifically of the *endings* of fictions in this way. The undoubted change from closed to open endings is a matter of great interest in the development of the novel form, but it seems unlikely that the notion of "feminization" will help us to understand it. Despite my reservations about the theoretical part of this chapter, Professor Rose does say interesting things, for example, about *Jacob's Room*. Her note on the parallel between the style of the novel and of Eliot's "Prufrock" is a useful addition to the growing awareness of the pervasive influence of T. S. Eliot on Virginia Woolf's work.

Taking Virginia Woolf's ideas about society women as a starting point for a discussion of her ambivalent attitude towards Clarissa Dalloway proves to be an illuminating way of approaching *Mrs Dalloway*, and by drawing on Virginia Woolf's diary and essays Professor Rose probes the more painful ambivalence of her attitude towards Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. But it is in the chapter on this novel that the dangers of Professor Rose's kind of biographical method become apparent. The epigraph to her book is taken from Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, which is quoted as a warning against "transporting our own bees into other people's bonnets" (p. xii). On the whole, the biographer avoids this, though I think her determination to see feminism as the exclusive "crux" of Virginia Woolf's work leads to some distortion (she fails to convince in her argument that *Three Guineas* is more interesting than *The Waves*). But at times the biographer seems to be in danger of falling into the opposite kind of error: of allowing her subject's interpretation of events remain unqualified. Although Professor Rose does speak of Virginia Woolf's creation of myths about herself and points out inconsistencies in her autobiographical accounts, there is no consistent scepticism in the biographer's handling of this kind of information. Like Mrs Ramsay, Virginia Woolf was very prone to exaggeration—either just for the fun of it, or to make her point more vividly. Professor Rose does not give her reader sufficient warning of this, for example, in her discussion of Virginia Woolf's contrast between men's and women's colleges in *A Room of One's Own*:

Woolf suggests that such confidence is at least partially instilled in a young Englishman of the upper classes by the wealth poured into universities to dignify the molding of his mind; the sumptuous dinners of roasts and delicacies are compared to the fare of women's colleges—gravy soup and prunes. Gold plate and Persian rugs may seem trivial in the life of the mind, but they are instruments by which a society nurtures the privileged among its young (p. 155).

No one would want to deny the writer the right to imagine a sumptuous dinner (including "many and various" partridges!) especially if she has warned us quite frankly that "lies will flow from my lips", but the biographer should alert the reader when she is moving from a real to a symbolic landscape.

In "Life Without a Future" Professor Rose deals with Virginia Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, and her suicide. She finds that "the qualities that make Woolf's work distinctive—the leaching away of authorial presence, the lyric grace, the fragmentariness and richly random development—are more prominent here than ever before" (p. 237). There are a number of photographs accompanying the text, and in this chapter a grainy, gloomy view of the river Ouse under a louring sky adds a suitably Stygian note.

ALLEN McLAURIN

W. H. Auden. The Life of a Poet.
CHARLES OSBORNE.

Eyre Methuen, 1980, £7.95.

Charles Osborne's biography leaves undisturbed the accepted view of Auden's life. Starting with the precocious schoolboy telling his matron "I like to see the various types of boys", it moves to the eccentric undergraduate dealing out dicta from Freud in artfully darkened rooms, passes on to the dazzling young poet of the thirties, reaches the increasingly authoritative writer and teacher making the long haul through middle age, and ends with the old man in carpet slippers tired of the modern world. Osborne implicitly presents the decade of the thirties as the most significant. Of the eleven chapters chronicling the life five are concerned with the years 1928-40, and one of fifteen pages is devoted to one year, 1936. The years 1953-1964, on the other hand, are dealt with in thirty-eight pages which

seem blurred in comparison. The story of the poet's life is in some ways depressing, finally seeming to dwindle sadly. What transforms it is the power of the poetry which Osborne virtually ignores here.

The book is written within certain limits. It does not fill in social backgrounds and it leaves unfilled several hiatuses. The salient facts of Auden's life are clearly and sympathetically set out, along with many fascinating new details. It is surely a good sign that the reader is left wanting more information and, particularly, more analysis and interpretation. For example, we want to know more about Auden's early family life and discover its emotional dynamics. This would help us to understand in turn Auden's later Christianity. Some worlds in which Auden lived are familiar, Oxford in the 1920s for example, but less familiar and equally important are the homosexual milieux. And we still do not know what, if anything, Auden did politically during the thirties.

Auden it seems was not witty but he was eccentric. He would make his bed by piling blankets and overcoats and, on one occasion, his host's stair-carpet on top of it. Other eccentricities were more pointed against social and moral conventions. It is clear that through the force of his personality and the brilliance of his intelligence Auden acted as a personal liberator for many, including the young Benjamin Britten. He played several roles with gusto: sexual outlaw, social spy, signaller from the outposts of progressive thinking, defender of the language, cultural polymath. In the thirties he might have become a revolutionary but like many Englishmen he stayed within the social system and gave back to it what he learned from his peculiar position inside it.

All his life Auden was engaged in a quest for existential salvation, and he used himself as the control experiment in order to observe the conditions of modern life. The commitment to self-understanding and self-authenticity came early. But there are a number of baffling problems, the greatest being his departure to America in 1939.

What were his motives? What were the effects on him? Osborne says that for Auden English life was like family life with its claustrophobia and cosiness. Going to America was his way of leaving home and growing up, a way of settling the struggle between poet and society that had been going on for a decade. But questions persist. Perhaps the move to New York represented not the resolution of the conflict between poet and society but a continuation of it. Auden seemed to be rejecting his home country and the culture in which he had played such a prominent, even symbolic, part. And yet in America he shortly embraced his family's old religion. Surely the psychic dramas being enacted were still obscurely concerned with the poet's struggle with England. And these continued. Edmund Wilson observed this when Auden returned to England in 1945:

Stephen Spender, his old buddy, said to me that he thought it would be the hardest thing in the world for Auden ever to come back to England. A few weeks later, however, he turned up and, as Spender said, took the arrogant line when he might have taken the humble line. Without showing the least embarrassment, he complained about the coldness of English houses, and of other hardships of life in England, and told them that London hadn't really been bombed. They were speechless with indignation . . . He also assured them—being a homosexual chauvinist—that General Eisenhower was queer. I love this story, because the English are such experts at putting other people down that it is wonderful to see an expatriate Britisher coming back and working out on the boys at home . . . (pp. 218-19).

Osborne depends heavily on secondary sources, particularly Stephen Spender's *W. H. Auden. A Tribute* (1974). For the early years much use is made of a long review-article which Auden published in *The New Yorker* (3 April 1965) in which he discussed his own early life as he reviewed the memoirs of Evelyn Waugh and Leonard Woolf. The notes often refer us to published memoirs of contemporaries like Spender, Isherwood, Driberg, MacNeice

and others. There is no information about the location of unpublished letters used, and it is not possible to use this book to track down source material. Osborne was a friend of Auden's for many years and so his account of the last fifteen or so years has its own intimacy and authority.

It is to be hoped that future biographies of Auden supply this book's omissions by filling in the social backgrounds, attempting a comprehensive account of the growth of the poet's mind and the development of his art, and an account of his psychic structure and growth. In the meantime the interested reader must supplement this book with Spender's *Tribute* where deeper insights and greater emotional resonance are to be found.

LAWRENCE NORMAND

Thoughts in a Dry Season: A Miscellany,
GERALD BRENAN.

Cambridge University Press, 1978, £6.95.

"A Miscellany". The sub-title is clear enough and I ought to have been warned. Nevertheless, when I first realized that this book is indeed what it appears to be—that is, a series of unconnected jottings—my reaction was rage. That any writer could present a work without putting himself to the elementary bother of organizing the stuff into continuous prose seemed to me infuriating, and still does, despite the fact that I found the book pleasurable reading for those idle, desultory hours which all too often (if we are honest with ourselves) interrupt the literary academic's working day.

The book is arranged under headings of really rather shameless banality, "Life", "Love", "Death" and so forth, and gives the same kind of pleasure as one imagines Mr Bloom might have taken as he lies in his bath giving free play to his thoughts and feelings in the "Lotus-Eaters" section of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Whatever the headings, the

indulgent *self*-love of a dilettante solipsist seems to be the book's real, and central, topic. Under "Life": "men would like to love themselves, but they usually find that they cannot". Under "Love": "one of the most subtle pleasures of love is the feeling that it gives of collusion. The two lovers are standing together against the world". And again under "Love", this time perhaps with more self-knowledge: "how ineradicable is egoism!"

The tone is cautious and prudish, the voice that of an agreeable maiden aunt maundering on about this and that without any great originality or distinction. Much the best section of the book is that on "Literature" where the jottings are longer and there are responsible, if over-short, discussions of literary topics. Some of it, though, is oddly parochial and old-fashioned. In his "Foreword" Mr Brenan observes that he was never at university, and I am afraid that this is rather too evident from some of the judgements that he allows himself. "Dickens . . . is surely in creative force our greatest novelist" although "his enormous faults and lapses prevent many people from re-reading him." Surely any knowledge of the enormous prestige now enjoyed by Dickens in the academies and the vast Dickens industry that flourishes (for good or ill) in the groves of academe would have prevented Mr Brenan from writing that sentence. It is a pity that he is timid and deferential in his literary judgements because when he trusts his preferences he is interesting: he prefers Ivy Compton-Burnett to Virginia Woolf because Dame Ivy had a "splendid sense for evil". Indeed she did, but Mr Brenan will not have the courage of his own insight: in the same sentence in which he makes this interesting and accurate claim he nervously calls Dame Ivy a "far lesser writer" than Virginia Woolf as though the argument is foregone and there is no point in discussing the matter further. Surely it might have occurred to Mr Brenan in the course of his wide and enthusiastic reading that the right to *disagree* over works of literature is, for many, the *point* of a literary education?

Still, the book is not out to make points or conduct arguments. It allows the reader to overhear the prattling of a moderately stylish mind at play and to perceive the contours of a mildly mischievous personality: "one of the most original and stimulating novels of this century is *The Confessions of Zeno* . . . Since it first appeared in English in 1930, I have made a practice of lending my copy to friends and giving them a black mark if they do not like it". I enjoyed Mr Brenan's book in a lazy sort of way and owe that much gratitude to its author. But surely it could, without too much work, have been a *book* rather than a scrap-book, since a publisher has gone to the very considerable expense of printing and distributing it? And surely the best and most interesting section, that headed "Literature", ought to have come first?

JOHN BATCHELOR

Welsh Dylan,
JOHN ACKERMAN.

John Jones, Cardiff, 1979, £3.95.

Although this new study of Dylan Thomas is based upon John Ackerman's *Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work* (1964), it is not a mere rehash of the earlier book. It incorporates material that was not available in 1964, explores the development of Thomas as poet and dramatist during the last few years of his life, and is enriched by a number of photographs, notably of places that nourished his imagination.

Mr Ackerman maintains that Wales was the most fruitful source of Dylan Thomas's poems and of all that was finest and most enduring in his imagination and in his life. His notebooks covering the years 1930-34 contain material that was drawn upon by the poet over the rest of the decade. Mr Ackerman puts the matter succinctly, remarking that these early notebooks "contain manuscript versions of just over half the poems eventually included in *Eighteen*

Poems, Twenty-five Poems and The Map of Love". Thomas's description of himself as the Rimbaud of Cwmdonkin Drive is more than a humorous, self-mocking boast: it points to his adolescent precocity and may harbour the fear that, like the French poet, he himself would destroy his life and achieve little after the fertile years of adolescence and early manhood.

Mr Ackerman is surely right in stressing the various elements in Wales and the Welsh that stamped themselves on Dylan's imagination in his formative years. He may or may not have been a Rimbaud, but he was indubitably of Cwmdonkin Drive: no. 5, to be precise. Thomas was born there on 27 October 1914, and from the house he could look down over Swansea and Swansea Bay. He went to Swansea Grammar School, at which his gifted, embittered father was senior English master. When Dylan left school in July 1931 he got a job as a reporter on the *South Wales Daily Post*, which seems to have left him plenty of time for strolling about, drinking and playing various parts in the Little Theatre of Swansea, including that of Simon Bliss in Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*. Mr Ackerman quotes from an article that Thomas wrote in 1932 about the failure of Anglo-Welsh bards to draw on the rich heritage of Celtic mythology and Welsh legends. He refers specifically to W. H. Davies, the most talented Welsh poet writing in English, and laments the fact that, instead of founding his poetry on the *Mabinogion* or on folklore, "he preferred to follow in the direct line of the hedgerow poets, leaning over some country stile with placid expression, thinking of nothing more edifying than the brevity of life, the green of the grass and the inanity of personal expression".

Dylan Thomas was influenced by the landscapes and seascapes of Wales that contrasted so sharply with what he called "the smokeridden horror of the towns". He responded also to the way of life that persisted in the small towns, villages and farms of Carmarthenshire, where various aunts and uncles still lived during his childhood and adolescence. Although he grew up in

the suburbs of an industrial town, he knew at first hand the world of West Wales, in which Nonconformist chapels dictated the patterns of behaviour that were followed by the respectable and officially observed even by those who in secret tasted the illicit pleasures of drink and women.

From what sources did Thomas derive his language and his imagery? Although he could neither speak nor read Welsh, Mr Ackerman observes that he was indebted to the speech-rhythms of those inhabitants of South Wales who, ignorant of Welsh, spoke an English that was rich in rhetorical devices and marked by distinctive rhythms. In this respect Dylan Thomas was a Welsh poet, whose verse takes on an even more unmistakable flavour of Welshness when recited by himself in the voice that George Fraser compared with a gong booming over a vast expanse of treacle.

Dylan Thomas left Wales for London in 1934 and had no permanent home in Wales until 1949, when Margaret Taylor, with great generosity, bought for him the Boat House at Laugharne. It could be argued that he wrote many of his finest poems during those fifteen years of exile and that London Dylan was a more gifted poet than Welsh Dylan. It should, however, be remembered that he paid a number of visits to his native land over the years and spent twelve months at New Quay, Cardiganshire. More importantly, he continued to find themes for his poetry in his childhood memories, even though he sold his early notebooks in 1941, remarking that "it's lovely when you burn your boats; they burn so beautifully".

Two of his most accomplished poems have their origin in events of his childhood and adolescence recorded in his early notebooks. "The Hunchback in the Park" commemorates a real hunchback who haunted Cwmdonkin Park from the moment the park opened until it closed. An early version of the poem is dated 9 May 1931; the final version was not completed until 16 July 1941. The genesis of "After the Funeral" follows a similar pattern. Ann Jones, who is celebrated in the poem, was a

sister of Dylan's mother. She lived in a Carmarthenshire farm, "Fern Hill", that Dylan described in his story "The Peaches", and about which he wrote in one of his best-known poems. When he learned that his aunt was dying of cancer, he wrote a letter that shows an acute, painful self-knowledge:

Many summer weeks I spent happily with the cancered aunt on her insanitary farm . . . But the foul thing is I feel utterly unmoved . . . Am I . . . callous and nasty? Should I weep? Should I pity the old thing? For a moment I feel I should. There must be something lacking in me.

Three days after Ann Jones's death on 7 February 1933 Dylan wrote a poem about her funeral. But the poem "After the Funeral" was not written until 1938 and is an almost complete reworking of the entry in the February 1933 notebook. It is as though Dylan derived inspiration from looking back across the years to the Wales of his boyhood, even though he was now living in the metropolis.

Mr Ackerman is particularly good on *Under Milk Wood* and on the way in which it is based on the topography of Laugharne. Indeed, he writes most persuasively about the later poems and their relationship with the sea and the countryside near Laugharne. He is, perhaps, less convincing when he seeks to refute the view that Dylan's genius was declining in his final years:

It is true that in the last six years of his life Dylan Thomas wrote only seven poems, but these were all major poems . . . It is a considerable poetic achievement in six years—whichever poet writing in English is chosen for comparison!

That seems to me a very rash claim: its shakiness is exposed if one considers the body of work produced in their last six years by three English poets who died even younger than Dylan Thomas: Byron, Keats and Shelley. But Mr Ackerman is justified

in reminding us that in Dylan's final years he was working on some fine unfinished poems, as well as writing stories, broadcast talks, exuberant letters and, of course, *Under Milk Wood*.

Welsh Dylan is illustrated with many photographs, some of which are new to me. There is a photograph of Dylan's father as a very young man, taken before disillusion began to harden his features and to corrode his spirit. Not only is there a photograph of Cwmdonkin Park—we are also given one of the fountain that provided drinking-water for the hunchback in the park. The photograph of Dylan and his mother on the Gower Cliffs, like that of Pamela Hansford Johnson with Dylan's uncles and aunts, evokes the world in which he grew up, just as the photographs of Laugharne and of the views from the Boat House help us to understand the nature of Dylan's last poems. Most touching of all, especially in the light of what was to come, are the photographs of Dylan, Caitlin and their children. Plate 23, "Croquet at Vernon Watkins", shows Caitlin and Dylan looking unbelievably innocent and young and vulnerable.

The publicity claims that Mr Ackerman's book sets the salient facts of Thomas's life before the reader. There are, unhappily, many salient facts of his life that fall outside the scope of this book and that reveal a dark, destructive side of his nature. Anybody who wants a full picture of the man needs to study *Dylan Thomas* (1977) by Paul Ferris. But Mr Ackerman has fulfilled the aims set down in his preface and given us much cause for gratitude. He writes lucidly and succinctly, avoiding pretentious jargon, covering a lot of ground, selecting illuminating quotations. Above all he is concerned not with exhibiting his own erudition and ingenuity but with helping us to understand the development of a lyric poet and the way in which he confronted the problem of growing old.

JOHN PRESS

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DENYS VAL BAKER is the author of forty books, including a series of autobiographical accounts of family life in Cornwall. He has also edited numerous anthologies and short story collections. During and after the War he ran a literary magazine, *Voices*, in which he published material by Elizabeth Myers and Littleton Powys, as well as studies and reviews of Powys works. More recently he founded and edited the *Cornish Review*.

JOHN BATCHELOR is a Fellow and Tutor in English at New College, Oxford. His publications include *Mervyn Peake: A Biographical and Critical Exploration* (Duckworth, 1974), and articles on Virginia Woolf. He has also written a novel, *Breathless Hush* (Duckworth, 1974). His study of the Edwardian novelists (Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Wells, Galsworthy and Forster) will be published Autumn 1980/Spring 1981.

MARIUS BUNING is a Senior Lecturer in English literature at the Free University, Amsterdam, and the editor of the *Dutch Quarterly Review*. He has published articles on Joyce and Beckett and one on T. F. Powys scholarship, "Follydown Revisited" (*English Studies*, 1969); his dissertation, *T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist* is scheduled to appear next year.

GLEN CAVALIERO, a member of the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge, is the author of *John Cowper Powys, Novelist* (O.U.P., 1973), *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939* (Macmillan, 1977) and *A Reading of E. M. Forster* (Macmillan, 1979).

T. R. M. CREIGHTON is Senior Lecturer in English literature in the University of Edinburgh. He has held various academic posts in Britain and Africa over the past thirty years and was formerly principal African correspondent for the *Spectator*. More recently he has edited *Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection* (Macmillan, 1974) and has also contributed an article on Hardy and religion to *Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years* (Macmillan, 1978), edited by L. St John Butler.

PETER DAVISON has lectured at the Universities of Sydney and Birmingham, and has recently moved from the Chair of English at Lampeter to another at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He is editor of *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*. His published work reflects his varied interests in editorial method, Shakespeare and Renaissance drama, modern European drama, film, music and popular culture; it includes *Songs of the*

British Music Hall (New York, Oak Publications, 1971), and a multi-volume collection, co-edited with Rolf Meyersohn and Edward Shils, *Literary Taste, Culture and Mass-Communication* (Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1979). His two-volume study of the legitimate and illegitimate dramatic traditions in Britain will be published by Macmillan during 1980.

ICHIRO HARA was a Professor of English (now retired) at the Universities of Hosei and Waseda, Japan. His publications, all in Japanese, include *Humanism* (1965), *Wordsworthian Studies* (1970), *The Religion of Poetry* (1973), the translation of J. C. Powys's *A Philosophy of Solitude* (1977) and *John Cowper Powys, His Life and Thought* (1977), the first full-scale introduction to J. C. Powys in Japan. This year his translation of *Mortal Strife* is to be published, with Professor G. Wilson Knight's Preface. He is at present writing a second book on Wordsworth in relation to J. C. Powys's "unique philosophy of Elementalist sensationism". He corresponded with Powys from 1953 to 1962 and, in 1961, visited him at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

CEDRIC HENTSCHEL lectured in the universities of London, Innsbruck, Breslau and Uppsala before joining the overseas service of the British Council. His writings in the field of Comparative Literature include "John Cowper Powys and the Gretchen-Cult", *Studia Neophilologica*, 1941; *Alexander von Humboldt's Synthesis of Literature and Science*, Inter Nationes, 1969. *The Byronic Teuton*, Methuen, 1940 (Folcroft reprint, 1969). In 1979 he edited the bilingual anthology, *Lord Byron: Ein Selbstbildnis*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, and his contribution to an international symposium, *Byron and Europe* (ed. Paul G. Trueblood), is to be published shortly by Macmillan and Barnes and Noble.

CICELY HILL, as the wife of a diplomat, spent five years in Japan.

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).

IAN HUGHES is researching at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, where he is working

on a critical edition of J. C. Powys's *Maiden Castle*. His first collection of poems, *Slate*, was published in the Arfon Poets pamphlet series in 1977, and a sequence, "Permon", in *Poetry Wales*, 15, 1 (1979).

ALLEN McLAURIN has taught at the Universities of Lancaster and Birmingham and in Shinshu University, Japan. He is at present Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities, Hull College of Higher Education. He is author of *Virginia Woolf, The Echoes Enslaved* (C.U.P., 1973) and has also co-edited the Virginia Woolf volume in the Critical Heritage Series. He has contributed numerous articles on modern literature to journals in Britain, Japan and America.

LAWRENCE NORMAND lectures in English literature at Saint David's University College, Lampeter.

JOHN PRESS is both poet and critic. In January 1980 he retired from the British Council and now plans to devote a proportion of his time to writing and lecturing. His poetry includes *Uncertainties and other poems* (O.U.P., 1956), *Guy Fawkes Night and other poems* (O.U.P., 1959) and *Aspects of Paris* (Richmond, Keepsake Press, 1975). His critical studies include *The Fire and the Fountain* (O.U.P., 1955), *The Chequer'd Shade* (O.U.P., 1958), *Rule and Energy* (O.U.P., 1963), *A Map of Modern English Verse* (O.U.P., 1969) and *Lengthening Shadows, Observations on Poetry and its Enemies* (O.U.P., 1971), as well as pamphlets on Marvell,

Herrick, Betjeman and MacNiece for the Writers and their Work Series.

PETER REDDICK, currently the Gregynog Fellow in Arts, University of Wales, teaches at the Faculty of Art and Design, Bristol Polytechnic. His book illustrations include wood engravings and line drawings for a wide variety of publishers and subjects, but most notably on the novels of Hardy and Trollope. His are the line drawings in the Ark Press edition of *So Wild a Thing*, Letters of Llewelyn Powys (1973).

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER (1893-1978) published numerous novels and volumes of short stories and poetry throughout more than fifty years. Perhaps her best known works are the early novels, *Lolly Willowes* (1929) and *Mr Fortune's Maggot* (1930), her biography of *T. H. White* (1967) and the latest collection of stories, *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977).

T. J. WINNIFRITH is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Warwick. His publications include *The Brontës and Their Background* (Macmillan, 1973) and *The Brontës* (Macmillan, 1977).

JOHN WORTHEN lectures in English literature at the University College of Swansea. He is the author of *D. H. Lawrence and the Idea of the Novel* (Macmillan, 1979), and has edited *The Lost Girl* for the forthcoming edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence, published by C.U.P..

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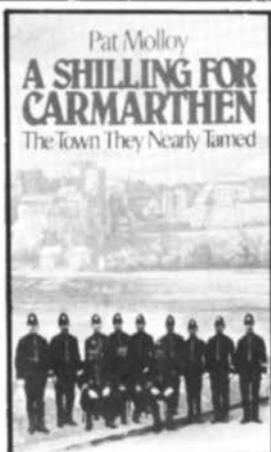
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