

The Powys Review

NUMBER EIGHT



Angus Wilson

SETTING THE WORLD ON FIRE

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Correspondence, contributions, and books for review may be addressed to the Editor, Department of English, Saint David's University College, Lampeter, Dyfed, SA48 7ED

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Editorial

There are obviously many and various ways of reading *So Wild a Thing*, Llewelyn Powys's letters to Gamel Woolsey, June 1928 to November 1939 (edited as a narrative by the late Malcolm Elwin and published by the Ark Press, 1973). One can immerse oneself in them as the love-letters, often passionate, often lyrical, of a literary man who has 'fallen in love'. One can stand back disenchantedly and find these effusions sometimes mawkish, sometimes cloying; and, perhaps further to this, one can see Llewelyn both consciously and unconsciously constantly extending, even converting, reality into fiction, the fiction which was eventually to be composed into his novel, *Love and Death* (1939). Or, aided by Malcolm Elwin's excellent narrative of events into which the letters are inset, one can approach them biographically, tracing Llewelyn's active, literary and emotional life from his meeting Gamel Woolsey in November 1927 to his death in December 1939. Here one sees the life in the context of his relationships with Powys relatives and friends and their comments on his relationship with Gamel, and, above all, in the context of his relationships with those tolerant and surely suffering people, his wife, Alyse Gregory, and Gerald Brenan. In this biographical context and prompted by Malcolm Elwin's own daring suggestions, one can make psychological speculations as to the complex of motives and feelings of Gamel and Llewelyn. Did Gamel really want a child of Llewelyn's such as she proved physically unable to bear? (She lost two of Llewelyn's children during pregnancy, one by miscarriage, in America in 1928, one by abortion, in England, 1929, but these were not the only such losses in her life.) Was Llewelyn's love largely a longing to have a child? (For he repeatedly refers to a child: see especially pages 32, 33, 36, 37, 47, 48.) Was his love quickened when it became totally forbidden and physically frustrated? The very first letters are those of

a courteous, middle-aged man to a girl (and Gamel was twenty-eight, Llewelyn forty-three in 1927): "How generous and charming you were to me, dear Gamel. I can never forget your grace either of mind or body . . . May I really keep this little book of poems, the central petal of so lovely and cherished a flower." They quicken after the arrival of Gerald Brenan in East Chaldon in July 1930, soon to propose marriage to Gamel (who had followed Llewelyn there from America in May 1929). Forbidden love becomes stronger when threatened: "Our love is not over. It is . . . like the daffodil in the corner of the house of the secret garden where we used to cling to one another." But probably it is unfair to ask such questions and make such observations; certainly they are incongruous with the concept of romantic love which underlies Llewelyn's letters.

The cloying elements of the letters come largely from Llewelyn's entry into what he sees as Gamel's own-created, fictitious world of poetic vision, "middle earth", linked with fairy and medieval romance, a curious amalgam of child and adult fantasy. He will observe, for example, her "neck with its tiny love-mark on its sun-brown skin like a little round hog-weed seed that had been placed there to decorate (her) by an acorn fairy who had loved (her) long ago in the south" or declare to her, "I said [to J. C. Powys] you were too medieval, like a woman in *The Faery Queen*, like a girl in a forest glade or going to her turret by the tapestried passage out of the hearing of the sounds of fantastical hate!" Such escapist and lover's sweet-nothings have ingredients attractive to a variety of mid-Victorian painters; one might in more positive defence of them observe that they are of the very world which, even now, in the world of the machine, our young children by nature wish to be the true world into which they will grow up (with the difference, perhaps, that the ideal world of children contains plenty of laughter). But these love

letters may be distasteful to adults, to whatever degree they are enchanted by day-dreams of child and lover. More positive distaste, of a very different kind, may be felt by those readers-between-the-lines who are guided by notions of personal responsibility, the difficult business of loving one's neighbour as one's self. Here enjoyment of Llewelyn's world of love may be marred by an awareness that the third person in the drama unfolded by *So Wild a Thing*, Alyse Gregory, was showing this virtue in an unusual way: for apparently she was asked to foster her husband's love for his mistress and did. This mode of reading, involving moral judgement, and usually best avoided, has already been deftly touched upon, together with the related question as to what extent the writer of the love letters had an eye to posterity, by Jeremy Hooker in a review (*The Anglo-Welsh Review*, Winter 1974, Vol. 24, Number 53, pp. 218-220).

Alyse Gregory, expressing the hope that the love letters exchanged by Llewelyn and Gamel would be published, commented: "There is no injury that death does not cancel and no folly that it does not reveal, and expressions of love give joy to the living". The joy given by *So Wild a Thing* is revealed at first glance by the beauty of its publisher's presentation of the text itself in paper, type, cover and illustrations by Peter Reddick. For the book is a superb celebration of love in a rural setting. Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory (married in 1924) met Gamel Woolsey in Patchin Place, New York, at the end of 1927, when Llewelyn was beginning six months there as visiting critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, but, after only three extracts from letters of 1928, Malcolm Elwin's selection plunges us into Llewelyn's reconstruction of a love enjoyed in Dorset, orchestrated by images of its flowers, fields, hedges and cottage rooms. Even painful events are transformed by the rural ideal: "with you even an Xray waiting room becomes a place where birds are singing". At the height of Llewelyn's yearning for the absent Gamel, in particular through the winter of 1930-31, country images blend with ecstatic dreams of love's consummation

or frustration. His country images give more "joy to the living" when they come in apparently less contrived abandonment to memory. Such evocations, despite some apparent falling off after 1932, appear throughout the letters. They vary from a revivifying of love through sketches of place, as of September 1930:

I doubt there is a single spot between White Nose and Ringstead where we have not met, often in the grass walk, once on the hillock where the little dip is, often near Mrs Linklater's, by the stile also, and by the badgers the first time, in the fairy glade, by the thistles where the goldfinches fed . . .

to frequent association of her with country sense-experience and always with the scents of summer flowers: "The memory of you is always like a honeysuckle hedge in the first week of June" (1936) (so that one soon perceives Gamel as what John Clare would have called his "Rural Muse"), to the final country glimpses of her mistily vanishing or coming momentarily bodily near in the very last letters of October and November 1939. At the last, Llewelyn's concept of Gamel appears to have been affected by his reaction against his sense of the shadows of war and his own death, and invigorated by the publication of his gift to Gamel, his "garland of sunny dandelions", *Love and Death*:

The war will pass, but do keep alive, so I can hope to see you again, my darling, made out of the breath of the morning birds, out of the breath of the midnight moon . . . the thought that I may see you again is to me a thought rapt and sweet-smelling as a primrose bed under a beech tree.

Often a token, a gesture, a word at the end of a letter, can evoke in a moment the eye-bright, the thyme, the quivering sunshine and the banks of Maiden Castle, the silent magic of Dorset woods, and the sea valley where we used to walk. In those cold flint fields when your tall boots were muddy, how lovely it was to me to feel *you near*—as we walked looking and stooping over those austere plough lands where the sea winds go.

A regret in reading *So Wild a Thing* is that one cannot see enough of Gamel's response to Llewelyn. Malcolm Elwin's only

quotation from one of her letters, of January 1931, is cool, clear and 'to the point', with sentences like, "And I do hope Alyse is better and is happier. I do grieve and worry about her, and the injury I have done your life together." Alyse Gregory's private response to the Llewelyn and Gamel affair has been made public in that other beautiful book from the Ark Press, *The Cry of a Gull*, an edition of her *Journals 1923-48* (1973). The editor is reviewing these books because the reading of them, especially *So Wild a Thing*, is probably a necessary prelude or adjunct to the reading of the selection of Gamel Woolsey's letters to Alyse Gregory which we are pleased to publish at the end of this *Review*. They are presented by Kenneth Hopkins who has recently published several collections of Gamel Woolsey's poetry through the Warren House Press, has made one published entry into her mind through his own long poem, *Gamel and Rex* (1979), and continues to work on her biography.

The main body of this *Review* is devoted to the works of John Cowper Powys, with special attention to his early novel, *After My Fashion* (1919), which he apparently chose not to publish, the late novel which he declared his "masterpiece", *Porius* (1951), and also to his literary relationship with two master-influences of his creative work, Hardy and Whitman. Our opening article is on Evan Evans, eighteenth century Welsh scholar and poet, translator and editor of the important *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (1764). This brings us in touch with one of the earliest modern explorers of the Welsh literary and mythological traditions which (though he rarely adhered closely to related historical facts) were so exciting to John Cowper Powys and contributive to his Welsh novels, especially to *Porius*.

John Cowper Powys's *After My Fashion*

(Picador, 1980, £2.50):

a series of views

GLEN CAVALIERO

After My Fashion:

“more quiet and less mad”:
a contribution to the canon

Writing to his brother Llewelyn following the publication of *Rodmoor*, John Cowper Powys speculates:

I think my third novel must have Sussex for its background and I think Nature must obtrude itself less—don't you?—and I think it must be more quiet and less mad—eh?—and also must be free from the influence or even the suggestion of any other writer—ha?

And here presumably it is, emerging at long last from its confinement. The fact that Powys never tried to publish it in later years gives the lie to the suggestion that he was a slapdash author without literary self-respect; indeed this novel, inevitably taken up by his admirers with a mixture of delight and apprehension, turns out not only to be an addition but also a contribution to the canon. All Powys's readers must be grateful to Pan/Picador for their enterprise in making it available, and to Richards Sparks for producing such an attractive cover.

The reason for Powys's not furthering its fortunes may be that having tried unsuccessfully to follow his own prescription he found that prescription faulty. *After My Fashion* shows a commendable reaction from the melodrama and emotional afflatus of *Rodmoor*, but in attempting to write a novel of ordinary human relationships, and to confront the American scene directly, Powys was going against his imaginative grain. This novel is pulled in two directions. The tragic love story of the middle-aged poet Richard Storm and the young vicar's

daughter he marries and accompanies to New York, is told with a subtlety that looks ahead to the Wessex novels; but when Powys tries to integrate their story with a picture of contemporary Greenwich Village artists he comes woefully unstuck. As a portrait of Isadora Duncan his Elise Angel is well enough—so long as her creator is content to describe the effect of her dancing; but in her human relationships her appearances seem closer to some vamp of the silent screen.

‘I've found him at last!’ she whispered to herself. ‘The free spirit worthy of me. It will be easy enough if he loves me. But if I love him—let him beware!’

One almost hears that famous, “Kiss me, fool!”

However, it was a brave try, and certainly a more successful one than Llewelyn's delineation of top society in *Apples Be Ripe*. And even when the surface reality and dialogue ring false, the inner motivation and reactions of the characters are rendered with the customary insight. The New York scenes, although the least successful portion of the novel, constitute its most unusual and to that extent its most interesting feature. They presumably had a negative value for their author since he did not again seek to repeat them. (The *Autobiography* is a different matter altogether.)

But the greater part of the book is set in Sussex. Here nobody is going to be disappointed: all Powys's powers are brought to bear on the kind of generalised evocation of which he was such a master. The opening chapter describing Richard's meeting with Nelly in the church at Littlegate; and the description of Selhurst (Chichester), of the Downs and above all of birds and flowers,

look forward to the finest things in *Ducdame* and *Wolf Solent*.

Indeed Powys was clearly to re-work a good deal of *After My Fashion* into later novels. Mrs Solent is developed from the formidable Mrs Shotover (is the name an unconscious echo of *Heartbreak House*?); the heterodox old vicar John Moreton is to father both the Reverend Matthew Dekker and his son, and on his death bed reveals a tortoise neck like that of Sylvanus Cobbold. Catherine, the young bohemian who cohabits chastely and so fatally with Richard, is of the boy-girl sylph type which constantly appears in Powys's fiction; the Priory farm looks ahead to the landscapes of *Ducdame*; and the whole theme of return to ancestral haunts is to be developed further in *Wolf Solent*. The novel's suppression was at least put to effective use.

For all the attempted naturalism the essentially symbolic nature of Powys's imagination is continuously apparent. It reveals itself not only in the various backgrounds, such as the downland valley of Richard and Nelly's betrothal, or the desolate Atlantic City beach, scene of Elise and Richard's separation, but also in more unobtrusive forms of notation. The mysterious young man who emerges out of the blue, only to die, is called Roger Lamb—the surname suggests a sacrificial victim; and it is his death which proves to be the catalyst that breaks up the relations between the protagonists. (The name could also be a combination of Roger Fry and Henry Lamb—there is a scornful reference to "the skirts of Bloomsbury".) At the end of the novel Richard dies after rescuing a sheep from drowning in a dewpond; and its weight fuses in his mind with his idea of his own poetry and with his sense of God. Similarly, the use of Dante's *Vita Nuova* as a paperweight to keep Nelly's farewell note in place recalls Richard's scornful awareness of that book's fulfilling a similar function in Mrs Shotover's over-crowded drawing room. In the context of this closely woven narrative texture, the attempts to be up-to-date constitute even more of a wrench.

But if the book lacks the unity, and indeed

the power, of *Rodmoor* and *Ducdame*, it offers a great deal to enjoy. Afficiandos will relish familiar mannerisms (the New York artist's model "selecting another chocolate with exquisite care") and note, less happily, the customary eccentric use of words like "drastic". Nelly's father and his heresies are portrayed with affectionate humour, and there is another of John Cowper's poignant little girls. Richard himself is analysed unsparingly, with a far greater detachment on the author's part than we find in the delineation of Adrian Sorio in *Rodmoor*. He is also more convincing as a man of letters. This book, one suspects, is strongly autobiographical (perhaps Powys felt that it was too much so). And no more than in its successor could he imagine a happy fulfilment for his hero: once again death by water is the conclusion. In *After My Fashion*, however, there is a sardonic ambiguity at the end that looks ahead to the mature work to come. The naturalistic venture had by no means been all loss.

BEN JONES

After My Fashion:

literary criticism and dualities

Detailed study of the previously unpublished *After My Fashion* will soon be underway, but first the community of Powys scholars and friends needs to acknowledge with gratitude Pan-Picador's adventurous publication of the novel. They have made it available at the right time, in conjunction with the other John Cowper Powys novels which they have so successfully reprinted and distributed, all of them in attractive formats. Special note should be made of Richard Sparks's remarkably appropriate and provocative cover illustration for *After My Fashion*. They have also published it in the right way, without lengthy scholarly or critical commentary. Francis Powys's "Foreward" strikes the proper balance between the informative and the tantalizing. We are given enough information about the Elise Angel-Isadora Duncan relation to ask:

“Can it really be she?” and “Was it really that way?” Then we are brought back to fiction, reminded that the novel has its own integrity to establish and declare.

After My Fashion cannot be read as a “new” novel: we know too much about Powys’s later development. It resonates with the dualities, the characters (the old people, the deviant ecclesiastics, the aspiring and disenchanting writers, and, particularly, the contrasting women), the patterns of action (the return to native ground), and the evocations of sensuality which we associate with the later fiction. Yet, it is filled with new information, with arresting insights into human character, with startling achievements in characterization and composition. It adds substance to the Powys canon, and it will, I believe, make us think somewhat differently about Powys’s artistic development and achievement, and about his life.

Take, for example, what the novel shows about Powys’s attitude towards the intellectual and artistic life. Richard Storm, like other Powysian heroes, is a writer searching out his origins. Storm at the beginning is still enjoying some success as a recognized literary critic, albeit in Paris, ready to state and defend his theory and judgement. Compare Storm to the shabby John Crow returning to England after fifteen years down and out in Paris, or to Wolf Solent recovering from his “malice-dance”, or to Dud No-Man, returning to Dorchester to recover a lost identity. Storm’s intellectual status is still important to him, and his views provide a surprising contrast to Powys’s literary criticism of these years: Storm defends the new and the experimental in his arguments with the painter Robert Canyon (pp. 43-46), Powys attacks the “modern” writers repeatedly in *Visions and Revisions* and *Suspended Judgments*. The argument provides a particularly interesting dialectic when read in the light of Powys’s own views on tradition and experiment (although Powys, like Storm, author of a *Life of Verlaine*, agrees on the importance of French literature and criticism, of Rémy de Gourmont in particular). The point to note

in these contradictions is Powys’s deep involvement in his own criticism during this period. *After My Fashion* reveals the turmoil of professional reassessment.

Powys’s reassessment of his poetry, perhaps even his decision to give it up, is shown in a conversation with Elise Angel. Storm states a position which is Powys’s own. Elise put him straight: “Your poetry is a kind of self-indulgence” (p. 221). We suspect that Powys knew this to be so. (And, we wonder, did Isadora Duncan and John Cowper Powys discuss such matters? *Autobiography* offers a splendidly pertinent line: “Isadora Duncan too ‘got my number,’ even as I most assuredly got hers!”) Like the debate with Canyon about literary criticism, this exchange presents what may seem to be uncertainties. Rather than uncertainties, however, the episodes are consciously organized dialectical set-pieces from which Powys could reassess and re-establish his position. Throughout the novel (for example, the political discussions with Elise’s Russian companion, Karmakoff*) we are given obvious connections to Powys’s intellectual and personal life.

The novel focuses intently on the crises of this period, but it has its own life as it tells the story of a compulsive, indulgent and progressively disenchanting man, trapped by his own action and by his time. The action, composed with considerable care, shows that Powys was undertaking to establish himself as a conscious and deliberate craftsman. There are occasional excesses in the descriptive passages in the chapters set in Sussex, and there are, unfortunately, loose threads in the New York City chapters, but overall Powys displays mature artistic skill in the pacing of action, the creation of atmosphere (even in New York City), and the development of central characters.

The organization of tensions, particularly the mingling of the sensual richness and moral oppressiveness of Sussex, is at times carried out with brilliance. The surface

*Karmakoff’s cultivated, pipe-smoking character is far different from Isadora’s real-life Russian husband, the poet Yesenin.

action develops with ease and economy, but Powys does not allow the deeper tensions to be forgotten. The deeper tensions are those of the "old accursed duality" introduced as a basic thematic statement at the end of Chapter One: "After all, he thought, the more complicated pattern of our modern days has not liberated us from the old accursed duality. Will the balance, the rhythm, the lovely poise of things, *never* be obtained by luckless humanity, torn and divided between the two natures?" (p. 24). The design of the story is shaped from dualities—Storm's indulgence in sensual responses to earth and flesh contrasting with his groping towards the "deeper vibrations from the Unknown" (p. 89), the dilemma of the two opposing women, the confusions of his commitments to art, the ironies of his final defeat.

As for particular success in the work, he created several remarkable characters: the sometimes disagreeable, but prescient, and wonderfully drawn Mrs. Shotover; Mr. Moreton, the fallen priest; Robert Canyot, fascinating as a Powysian anti-self, but never fully realized; Nelly Moreton whose physical attraction and possessiveness Powys catches so well, but whose specious morality he does not seem willing to explore. Elise Angel remains an enigma. *After My Fashion* offers one of Powys's few attempts to write about a city in his fiction, and it is the only time he used his American experiences in his novels. The New York experiences are recast in *Autobiography*, but there the tone is different, much more reconciled than the novel's frustrations and anxieties.

"With *Sons and Lovers*," Leavis has said, "Lawrence put something behind him." The statement is only partially applicable to *After My Fashion*. It is a novel which Powys seems to have been compelled to write, perhaps as an exorcism. He was not finally successful in the immensely difficult task of shaping the dualities of his own experience into a totally creative design. He had not established his own emotional and moral perspectives, nor solved the problem of sustaining throughout the narrative a cohesive-

ness of vision. This in part explains the uneasy extravagance of the final scenes. Richard Storm is a richly complex character, and no mere one-dimensional fictive mask of Powys, but he does represent indulgent and self-destructive energies which Powys had to bring under control. Storm did not survive his quest, but the acknowledgement of such failure allowed Powys to continue *his* search for "the balance, the rhythm, the lovely poise of things."

CEDRIC HENTSCHEL

After My Fashion: a war novel

Though *After My Fashion* may lack the robust philosophy and the broad narrative sweep of John Cowper Powys in his belated prime, the very unevenness and occasional diffidence of its tone mirror the doubts as well as the aspirations of a post-war generation groping its way towards a new social order. It thus forms an intriguing link between the author's two 'war books'—between the polemics of *The War and Culture*, in which the lot of the individual appears subordinated to the needs of abstract war-aims, and those more personal aspects of warfare which, a quarter of a century after, were to enliven *Mortal Strife*. Yet if *After My Fashion* is in some sort a war novel, it has little to say of the carnage of the trenches and shuns those ugly, blood-and-guts revelations which characterize so much semi-autobiographical fiction of the 1920s.

In the opening chapters the echoes of the 1914-1918 conflict are insistent and monitory; they strongly recall the beginning of *Aaron's Rod* (1922), where D. H. Lawrence sees a new menace clouding the relief brought by the ending of the war: "A man felt the violence of the nightmare released into the general air." Richard Storm's war record (like his creator's, we may feel) has been "neither especially noble nor especially mean." We learn that before his return to England he had been doing "unheroic but necessary work in a certain

military base" in a small French town. We are also told that "though he had seen comparatively little of its real horror, the war had profoundly affected him." While many of his French friends have died at the front, those survivors who shared his earlier Bohemian life, far from re-moulding their existence, "have become more violently, more dogmatically than ever, their old, fierce, hard, fantastic, hedonistic selves." Not surprisingly, Richard Storm is restless and dissatisfied; but what has unbalanced him is not the war alone but "the war and Elise". The juxtaposition, scarcely flattering to Richard's dancer-mistress, is significant, for with it Powys sets the stage for a post-war tragedy in which hostilities are transferred from the military to the sexual plane.

If Storm had hoped to forget the stresses of war amid the rural tranquillity of Sussex, he is speedily disabused. He is himself "well aware of the sinister ambiguities of most patriotic moods", but Robert Canyon's empty right sleeve is a constant reminder that, in the long-drawn-out struggle for Nelly's favour, he is up against a doughty and daunting rival, the possessor of two medals for courage in the field, whose wealth, in contrast to Storm's relative poverty, enhances his masculine integrity. Nor does Nelly herself, though her affection might be thought the best of all antidotes for her lover's malaise, allow him to forget the past. At their first meeting Nelly's intuition leads her to suppose that Storm had been thinking of the war:

He hadn't of course been thinking of the war at all; and yet, in a very profound sense, he had been. The whole thing was 'the war' and the peace after 'the war' again! Like the shooting of a shuttle or like the darting of a fish his mind moved up and down all the vistas of confusion and misery that filled the world. Something in this girl's gravity as she looked at him brought vividly to his mind many things he had forgotten. 'The war can never really end,' he found himself muttering.

The dispiriting notion that, given man's aggressive nature, peace is the continuation

of war by other means is soon lent credence through the grotesque scene which interrupts the idyll set in Canon Ireton's walled garden. A gang of louts bait and injure "a wretched hydrocephalic child". Once more Storm reflects that the war "was not over". The intrusion of horror into the intimate rapport just achieved by the lovers in their romantic encounter is an oddly arresting episode; but it also serves to bring the relationship between Richard and Nelly into closer focus. We witness the play of Nelly's powerful maternal instinct which, in certain of his moods, Richard grows to resent, even though (yet another parallel with his creator!) he is ill-adapted to fend for himself in the hurly-burly of daily life.

The antagonism between Richard Storm and Canyon spills over into areas unrelated—or not seemingly related—to their rivalry over Nelly. The two men squabble over Literature as they squabble over Art, Canyon always defending conservative values while Storm pleads for innovation. A similar polarity is evident in their political opinions. Entrenched in traditional attitudes, some of which now appear curiously dated, Canyon sees Storm as a Sinn Feiner and a pro-Bolshevik who "believes in Egypt for the Egyptians and India for the Indians". That such dire reproaches, if not wholly stemming from jealousy are at least exacerbated by it, is demonstrated in a down-to-earth Powysian manner: standing by the window Nelly becomes engrossed in a dog-fight in the street, as her two admirers continue their wrangling in the room behind her.

Ever gravitating towards the larger dimension, Powys seizes on an important sub-theme in his book—the anguished doubts of the Rev. John Moreton—to extend his analysis of conflict to the theological sphere. The dilemma Nelly's father faces is that, while affirming Christ, he cannot accept God, because he believes it is "the conception of *God* round which have gathered all the tyrannies, superstitions, persecutions, cruelties, wars which have wounded the world." War, Powys seems to be telling us, does not spring solely from human incompetence or

ill-will, but from a spirit of malevolence immanent in the universe.

Who shall say to what extent a cosmic principle of Evil can justify the folly of mankind and so be urged by Richard Storm in mitigation of his vacillating conduct—to rate it no worse—towards the two women he loves? Perhaps it is too simplistic a view to say that he is his own enemy. Bad luck and coincidence do play a part—too large a part, we may think—in his downfall. It is certainly not his fault that his Paris publisher fails and that he is thereby plunged into poverty. Yet many of the injuries he suffers are self-inflicted: being at war with one's self is presented as one more facet of man's aggressive instincts. Or is Storm merely gauche and inexperienced in his behaviour and not wise enough to calculate its effects? Why, once he has triumphed over his rival and married Nelly, need he pursue his liaison with Elise Angel in so ham-fisted and self-destructive a manner?

Storm further forfeits our sympathy by his boorish treatment of the mutilated Canyonot, whom he wrongheadedly stigmatizes as "that insolent young coxcomb of an artist". When his relationship with Nelly begins to founder, he imagines Canyonot to be "an ugly one-armed sentinel at the gate of their lost paradise". We may not feel unduly shocked that Richard steals Robert's girl, for Nelly herself is a willing accomplice and even takes the initiative at crucial moments. But need Storm be quite so churlish and cantankerous in his dealings with Canyonot? Does his moodiness perhaps stem from a sense of inferiority, or even from a presentiment that in the end he will suffer defeat at his own hands and so restore Nelly to his rival?

Richard Storm had returned to England full of good intentions, buoyed up by the belief that his self-realization as a poet would prosper, with the coming of a more enlightened post-war social order:

He thought to himself, as he followed his favourite hazel path, that these difficult relations between men and women were really growing a little more adjustable nowadays. The war had left its impress, he thought. Old rigid

conventions were breaking down. Human beings were learning to be more generous to one another, less tenacious of their legal rights, more flexible, more reasonable.

Even the most cursory study of the 1920s tells us that there were solid grounds for Storm's initial optimism. Conventions were breaking down. Sexual emancipation, particularly of women, was entering a new phase. Against such a social background, Storm's vaunted philosophy of non-attachment seems admirably in tune with the spirit of the age. Perversely, instead of throwing in his lot with 'Bohemian' friends of equally progressive outlook, he chooses to marry an inexperienced girl whose possessiveness he comes to hate because it restricts his freedom. He thus himself conjures up a situation where he is bound either to forsake his innermost beliefs or else to kick against the marriage tie.

Robert Canyonot, with his distaste for 'lechery' ("I am old-fashioned, that is all") and his quiet conviction that life swings backwards and forwards without achieving true progress, has the poise and stability that Storm so sadly lacks.

In the final emotive scene where Storm dies in Canyonot's arms, having suffered a heart attack after his laborious efforts to rescue a trapped sheep, we sense that Powys is passing judgement on his two contrasted male characters—and perhaps on himself as well. Storm has made a bid to achieve a heroic gesture and so to emulate the valour of his adversary, but his self-sacrifice is as unrewarding as that of so many "better men" who have died in Flanders. Canyonot, the born survivor, victor alike in war and peace, champion of the staid, old-fashioned virtues, returns to Nelly, the widow who will bear Storm's child—a child that may inherit the brave new world Storm has glimpsed too soon. Yet however convenient Richard's death may be within the framework of the story, this sudden resolution of the sexual triangle wears a wrenched look and might even be thought a betrayal of Powys's own liberal creed.

The reader may also feel that the war

theme so deliberately developed in the earlier chapters is rather lost sight of towards the conclusion, as the human drama gathers pace. Yet even at the very end we are reminded of certain wider realities. As Richard lies dying, his mind filled with feverish speculations, he suddenly remembers Karmakoff, the Russian he had met in New York, "and he imagined himself putting the question to him as to whether they would have slaughter houses in an ideal state!" We know from so much of the later fiction, and especially from *Morwyn*, that 'slaughter house' is a key-word denoting a key-concept in the Powysian multiverse. Transcending its immediate application, it suggests not only man's exploitation of the animal kingdom but the cruel oppression of his own species; and with its ultimate Manichaean overtones it hints at a philosophical and theological dilemma of cosmic proportions. In *After My Fashion*, as in all his novels, Powys was also commenting on his personal mythology; and if the slaughter houses that enter into Storm's last conscious thoughts recall the bloodshed of the trenches, they also symbolize an eternal conflict. It could be maintained that despite its lack of military incident and although the actions of its protagonists convey a blurred message, *After My Fashion* is an attempt at a war novel on the grand scale.

KIM TAPLIN

*After My Fashion**: self-sacrifice

In 1919, when this novel was written, the notion of sacrifice must have had as much meaning as at any time in history. The nature of love and its relation to self-sacrifice, and the entelechy of this England so many died for, are the book's central concerns.

Should Nelly Moreton marry Robert Canyot, a man she has ceased to love, in

order to provide a home for her father? Should she, in any case, marry him in the cause of his art? Her father, the Reverend Henry Moreton, pays the price of his "discovery" that the idea of God is the focus of the world's cruelty by a painful struggle and giving up his living. He continues to celebrate a heretical Mass enacting the sacrifice of Christ, in whom he still believes as the focus of the pity and sympathy in the world. Dying, "He loved everyone; only he couldn't speak to tell them so. Annihilation had something to do with love, then? It must have." A character whom we have scarcely met, but who is called Roger Lamb, fails to survive a kill-or-cure operation. One by one characters are made unwilling sacrifices to the changing desires (psychologically speaking, the needs) of their partners. In a somewhat cursory political digression Ivan Karmakoff represents the view that the individual should be sacrificed for the general good. Should the Powys-hero, Richard Storm, sacrifice his sexual freedom to make his wife happy? Too late, he decides to do it—though not until he needs the comfort of her love—and, rejected, he fatally strains his heart while, literally, rescuing a lost sheep. *We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts?*

That we seem unable to co-exist without either hurting each other cruelly or undergoing utter self-negation is the burden of Powys's lament. Against this he sets pity and sympathy, rather than the more ambiguous love. One by one the characters are bereaved or deserted or sad or ill and someone is there to turn to, often someone who has showed callousness elsewhere. Love is another thing: love can manifest itself in a mother striking her subnormal child or, in the verdict of the artist Canyot on Nelly's rejection of Richard, "*She killed him because she loved him*". Readers of Powys will recognise the beginnings of his later insistence on the importance of kindness and his rejection of love as impossible. But here, in the person of Canyot, who lost his arm in the war and whose love for Nelly transcends possessiveness, we are offered a glimpse of a higher and more saintly love than Powys

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usually allows. And, significantly, Canyonot is able to produce painting that is important in a way that the poetry of the Powys-hero is not.

Storm's ecstatic, deep-rooted love of place—the first two-thirds of the novel is set in the Sussex downs—is bodied forth for us in a thick, beautiful tapestry whereon are embroidered the lovingly identified wild flowers and birds, the footpaths, the little teashops, the old walled gardens, the Church of England, the tiny nuances of character and social behaviour that are specifically English. These things assuage an exile's thirst. The novel was written in America, where Powys spent nearly thirty years: within the book, Storm has just returned from Paris. As the hero drinks cup after cup of tea—even seasoned Powysians will be amused at how many—he also drinks England. Those whose love of rural England connects with a sense of exile from Eden will drink eagerly here too. But Powys does not shirk the question, Is this escapism? Are these places, as Rupert Brooke saw them, refuges yet evasions, "Deep meadows yet, for to forget/The lies, and truths and pain"? Is there some sense in which we *ought* to share in the urban, the international, the modern, the turbulent, the uprooted, embodied then in the New World? There are also things Powys can't stomach about the English upper class, and he makes his hero exclaim at one point, "It is to escape from women like that . . . that people emigrate. Oh England, England, you certainly allow many troublesome persons many strange privileges!" The novel then moves—for the first and last time in his fiction—to America.

It is Canyonot who finds a need to go, in order to broaden his vision, although he has succeeded in catching "the happiness of England" in his work. Elise Angel, Storm's mistress and said to be based on Isadora Duncan, tells *him* that writing about the happiness of England is not enough. Cruelty and otherness have to be taken account of. Indeed even into the walled garden they intruded, as they have always done—here, in the screams of the bullied child, one of the

many incidents and motifs to be plundered for *Wolf Solent*.

The indestructible pain which like an underground stream of poison flows round the roots of all the roses in the world had burst its barriers once more. *The war was not over.*

Storm early on records "a deep desire to justify the accident of his own escape by some really adequate contribution to the bitter-sweet cup of the world's hard-wrung wisdom". Like so much of Powys's writing this is confessional. He forces himself to think aloud. Those who wince at such explicitness, those who allow their dislike of embarrassment to prevent their asking whence it springs, will never love Powys or recognise his wisdom. He attempts to be a spiritual Poor Tom, he attempts naked truth: and compared with him we are most of us, in Lear's word, "sophisticated". This book is no such "adequate contribution" as Powys speaks of. What book could be, as it were, a recompense for even one soldier's death? Yet how many authors could say, hand on heart, that *adding to the sum of human wisdom* was the motive behind their activities, and how many would have rested content with a single publisher's rejection—all that *After My Fashion* apparently received?

G. WILSON KNIGHT

After My Fashion: death

If the title of this newly discovered story, written between *Rodmoor* and *Ducdame*, is to be understood autobiographically it is misleading, since its fashion is not what we expect of Powys. We miss so many of his peculiarities and it is far more of a normal story, true to the play of forces that normally constrict us, as in the importance to its people of financial considerations: so often in fiction of high quality such constrictions are by-passed.

With sex, especially, we come sharply up against normality: an engagement involving a properly consummated marriage is

central, and others without marriage are important. Usually a Powys hero is un-at-home with normal sexuality. Elsewhere there are, necessarily, marriages, but nowhere else is normal sexuality isolated and so acutely analysed. It leads up to passionate and often highly dramatic antagonisms born of love and jealousy. The story surveys a range from physical passion to ideal love. Normal sex-emotion may also be contrasted with art; with poetry, or painting, or dance. These speak to the 'soul'. The hero's ill-fated hope to create a work of great, spiritualised, poetry may be conveniently related to Powys's own future life-work of spiritualised fiction, nearer poetry than novels, that followed.

All these psychological undulations are sensitively deployed. The events progress with dramatic inevitability and a convincing logic. It is, indeed, strange to have this most 'readable' book, which demands so much less of the reader than is usual with Powys. We find, however, a fair amount of nature description, here of Sussex country, which is certainly in his "fashion", together with the occasional use of some natural or animal analogy to point a quality, rather in the manner of Llewelyn Powys. When we move to New York, description is cogent, both in revulsion at its metallic materialism but also in recognition of it as an advance post in the human adventure. The response is balanced; balance and commonsense are pervading qualities.

I have been thinking of human relationships and perceptions, the book's main concern. Where religion and metaphysics are involved we are on more obvious Powys ground. The cleric, John Moreton, has lost his faith in God but believes firmly in the crucified Christ as an "eternal protest" against the sufferings of a cruel world. His feelings will be recognised by anyone who has read *The Complex Vision* or *A Glastonbury Romance*.

On the difficult question of death and human survival, to which Powys returns again and again throughout, right up to his final stories, our present work is not only adequate but contains, perhaps the most

important treatment of this appalling enigma in all his writing. What he needs to do is to balance our natural scepticism against our equally natural instinct, implanted from untold generations, that death is not all. The perfect balance needed is struck by Shakespeare's Timon:

My long sickness
Of health and living now begins to mend
And nothing brings me all things.
(*Timon of Athens*, v. i. 191)

In Powys's second novel, *Rodmoor*, this balance is assured. I have hitherto taken its reading of death to be the finest ever achieved by Powys, as the hero, believing in a "nothing" which is also a strange luminance, dies, like Timon, by the sea's infinitude; with a final positive struck by his last cry to the seraphic Baptise, recalling Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.

Here John Moreton's dying is carefully described (X. 144-7). For him words have become meaningless, only "annihilation" makes sense:

That was the secret then: John Moreton was being annihilated. He wished this being annihilated would never stop. It was the happiest sensation he had ever known. He loved everyone; only he couldn't speak to tell them so. Annihilation had something to do with love, then? It must have. And it was beautiful beyond expression. But what was the connection between annihilation and the immortality of the soul? He wished he could remember what the immortality of the soul meant. It was a musical sentence. It must have meant something once to him when his brain was clouded. But his brain was clear now and it meant nothing at all!

He is floating in "blue space", soon to get darker. He is "going to sleep upon velvet-black butterfly wings". He hears his Mother, who was dead, weeping. "He shouted 'Mother!' in an ecstasy of indescribable peace", and was gone.

As in *Rodmoor*, there is the final call to a loved one, but the emphasis falls not on being dead but as in Timon's words, on the Gradual dying, the *transition*; like "going to sleep", a sensation which Powys rated

highly (*A Glastonbury Romance*, XXIV; 1933 ed. 788, 1955 ed. 755; Letters to myself, still unpublished, 6 November, 1957). In this description of dying positive and negative are blended, as in the Buddhist 'Nirvana'. We may compare the paradoxical appearance of Jesus at the conclusion to Powys's late story, *Two and Two*.

This I take to be, with *Rodmoor*, Powys's two most balanced treatments of death. Unless we call in spiritualistic evidence, which Powys's world-view does not survey and is here best considered as irrelevant, nothing can well be added to them; and his later thoughts accordingly lack pungency. Other suggestions touching on spirit-life occur on pp. 73, 152, 236, 260 and (hinted) 287; and on the transition from sleep to waking on p. 47; for 'transition' has significance either way.* The high metaphysical triumph here achieved is in no sense an intrusion, but flowers naturally from the strenuous sexual and spiritual engagements handled throughout.

*I have studied the concept in an essay on Wole Soyinka, "The Transitional Enigma", to appear in a volume of essays on him at the Oxford University Press, New York. I have also written on it in "Beyond Poetry", for a talk given to the Anthroposophical Group, Cambridge, on 4 June 1980.

For Powys's love of all "marginal" impressions see Jeremy Hooker, *John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff, 1973), 26-33.

T. J. DIFFEY

After My Fashion: a view from Sussex

A substantial portion of *After My Fashion* is set in Sussex in that part of the county where Powys spent his "2nd thirty years with Burpham, Arundel, Sussex as a background". These were also the years when he lectured in America; that experience is drawn upon for the New York scenes of the book.

There have been changes in the Sussex landscape since John Cowper described it. The sheep, and consequently the finely

cropped turf, have disappeared from the South Downs, and some downland has been put to the plough. The wild flowers are less profuse than in *After My Fashion* and the coastal plain more built upon. Indeed the occasional tower block on the shoreline at Littlehampton and Bognor Regis (surely the Fogmore of this book and where John Cowper once convalesced) will be more likely to attract the attention from the downs, not the "windmills, gates and solitary trees, presenting that peculiar suggestion of an unbounded expanse behind them which dwellers by that particular portion of the English Channel come to know so well".

But Powys's fecund plain between the South Downs and the sea is not pure invention. It is corroborated, for example, by George Sturt. In his essay "Down into Sussex" (1913) he describes the life of the labouring men who migrated annually from Surrey to help with the harvest "in the manor" (the area around Chichester) and there conveys the impression of a landscape which is recognizably the same which Richard Storm, gentleman, crosses and re-crosses in *After My Fashion*.

The imaginary places located in the Sussex of the novel are Selhurst, Littlegate, Toat Great Pond and West Horthing. These are imagined to lie north east of Chichester (the Selhurst of the novel) in the direction of Arundel where there are the "great seignorial parks" such as Goodwood and Arundel Castle. Of this last, "you feel", Powys says in his *Autobiography*, "that Sussex can boast her 'melancholy seignorial woods' as well as any chateau on the Loire."

There is no point in trying to identify West Horthing with any actual place in Sussex since we are told nothing about it except that it is evidently on the downs and that Mrs Shotover lives there at Furze Lodge, appropriately for this region, at the end of a drive of old beeches. Its geographical location is not entirely satisfactory: on page 57 it is "poised high above the great seignorial park, at the point where the more luxuriant foliage of the lower slopes merges into the sheep-browsed turf of the bare

upper Downs" while on page 67 widespread park-like slopes are said to *rise* up from it. Similarly Littlegate: it is never said that the hamlet stands close to, if not immediately under, the downs, but this impression is certainly given. Yet Nellie, "in intervals of her dressing", is accustomed to taking leisurely peeps "at the familiar face of the distant Downs".

If the siting of the places is makeshift, their naming is not. Evidently John Cowper's talent in naming fictional characters, which his circle admired, could extend to places. Selhurst, Littlegate and West Horthing belong in that part of Sussex where in reality are to be found *Selsey*, *Littlehampton*, *Eastergate* and *Worthing*. (There is even a West Worthing on the railway line Powys frequently used.)

Selsey once had a cathedral, now obliterated by the sea. In 1075 the Normans transferred the Saxon bishopric inland to Chichester, Powys's Selhurst. The 'hurst' in the name is a familiar particle in Sussex place names.

Certain facts about the old village at Eastergate, which is between Chichester and Littlehampton prompt the conjecture—it is no more—that Eastergate may have given more than a bit of its name to Littlegate. The resemblances between Selhurst and Chichester, on the other hand, are not conjectural but obvious.

These, however, are not literary considerations. The book is patchy and sketchy and contains inconsistencies. Certainly Powys would have revised it before publication. It deserves publication now for its scattered insights into human nature, its rich evocation of rural England, and for the enormous interest it will have for those who already know Powys's work. It is not the book of his to begin on. Mercifully, it contains almost nothing of his undeniable but tiresome interest in the occult and the morbid. It does contain many of the preoccupations with moral and humane questions that should, where they find mature expression in *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands*, place him squarely among the major novelists.

Powys's statement in the *Autobiography* was that his novels were propaganda—"effective as I can make it"—for his philosophy of life. Here as in the other early books the philosophy is in the making: not until we come to *Wolf Solent* (1929) does it begin to crystallise. There are many clever writers who can tell us unkindly what we are: wisdom is rarer and sweeter than that—as Sophia in *Tom Jones* is rarer and sweeter than the women of Restoration Drama—it offers us some consolation, attempts some reconciliation. Powys's habit of analysing himself in his books is very far from self-admiring. He is hard on himself. Am I utterly self-centred? Am I capable of love? he is continually asking. If these are not questions that concern us we shall find nothing in Powys. The title is never explained, but I think we can gloss it as the author-hero's human appeal to his fellow-humans to recognise the unspoken boast and plea of each, "I too have loved—after my fashion".

Both cities possess cathedrals with cloisters and prominent spires no great distance from their railway stations. Both are graced with "great red-brick Georgian houses" and both may claim that it was "here that Keats must have composed his fragmentary 'Eve of St Mark'". Both are linked to the sea by canal. Powys describes the hospital to which Mrs Canyot is taken after her fatal accident as a "quiet, unprofessional-looking building". If this is the Royal West Sussex, it is, according to Ian Nairn, "Georgian, but ignoble" (Nairn and Pevsner, *Sussex*).

Selhurst, however, has literary antecedents as well as topographical. It surely owes something to Casterbridge, South Wessex, as well as much to Chichester, West Sussex. Both fictional places are permeated by their surrounding countryside. In Selhurst "the very streets were full of the fragrances of the fields" while Casterbridge "was a place deposited in the block upon a cornfield". I find another faint echo of Hardy, of Mrs Yeobright's journey across Egdon Heath to see Eustacia, in Powys's account of John

Moreton's hot and fatiguing journey over the downs, shortly before his death, to see Betty Shotover at Furze Lodge.

After My Fashion is not, however, Hardy. Francis Powys is right to stress this in his Foreword.

The novel is well endowed with Sussex detail. The smaller Sussex churches, for example, are aptly characterized in the description of Littlegate church, whose tower is compared to "an extinguisher upon an extinguished candle". Room too is found—in the telling of Richard Storm's death—for an interesting note on Sussex dew-ponds. And the downs are beautifully caught in this: "The immense undulating upland, along the crest of which they were now moving, was like some huge wave of the sea struck into immobility". Sometimes the Sussex location is overdone. It was unnecessary to make fifty years of Sussex rains and frosts fall on the headstone of Richard's grandparents; ordinary frost and rain will do.

Three chapters of Powys's *Autobiography* (6, Southwick; 7, Court House; 8, Burpham), which was written more than a decade after this novel, also, it is well known, have Sussex for their background. There are points of comparison to be made between these Sussex chapters and *After My Fashion*, though in this connection the Court House chapter is the least interesting. Here I must register a disagreement with the Foreword since I myself can find nothing in the novel of the Lewes neighbourhood of East Sussex though certainly there is much that is reminiscent of Burpham in West Sussex. It would be pedantic to notice the administrative division between East and West except that Powys is himself inclined to observe it in the *Autobiography*. Moreover, there is some geographical difference and what is depicted in *After My Fashion* belongs distinctly to the western part of Sussex.

Here are some of the comparisons between *After My Fashion* and the *Autobiography*. John Moreton in Littlegate is hostile to God for reasons shared by John Cowper in Burpham. To this period, Powys tells us,

belongs "My epic poem, 'The Death of God,' . . . modelled on the blank verse of Milton, Keats and Tennyson." The hair on Moreton's forehead grows "as one sees it in portraits of the philosopher Schopenhauer" while in the *Autobiography* it is the wrinkled forehead of the Southwick poet which "resembled that of Schopenhauer". *Dodd's Beauties of Shakespeare*, which does duty as a letter-weight in Mrs Shotover's drawing room is, in the *Autobiography*, the source of the quotation which Powys incants behind Hove station thus bringing on an ecstasy. The phrase "after my fashion", or variants, crops up more than once in the Sussex chapters.

In the *Autobiography* Powys recalls his first journey into Sussex: "It was not my country . . . but there was something about the place that was profoundly English". Now this is exactly the role of Sussex in *After My Fashion*. Its business is to be profoundly English, but not ultimately Storm's country. It must carry the weight of contrasts between, on the one hand, nature and love in the English countryside, and on the other, art and love; first, somewhat shadowily in Paris, and secondly, much more palpably, in New York. It would be mistaken to suppose that judgement is finally exercised in favour of Sussex.

The English afternoons in Sussex come close to, if they do not topple over into, the sentimentality of the calendar makers. About this R. G. Collingwood once wrote:

A considerable literature exists devoted to sentimental topography: books about the charm of Sussex, the magic of Oxford, picturesque Tyrol, or the glamour of old Spain. Are these intended merely to recall the emotions of returned travellers and to make others feel as if they had travelled, or are they meant as an invocation—I had almost said, to call fools into a circle? (*The Principles of Art*, 1938, p. 88)

Well, Powys, as is confirmed by "Ducdame", the title of his next novel, is interested in the business of calling fools into a circle, though his attitude to them seeks to predate that of contemporary scientific rationalism. The question here, however, is

whether the Sussex of *After My Fashion* fits any of Collingwood's categories: recollection, evocation, invocation. Instances of all are to be found except that what is invoked is less the topographer's Sussex than a Sussex put to spiritual purposes. In New York Storm looks back to the time in Sussex when "he was taking his pleasure in green pastures and beside still waters". If this does not convince, it is not that Sussex is not the necessary background of an intellectual and spiritual conflict but that the style in which it is done sometimes apparently falls into cliché.

Llewelyn Powys's later novel *Apples Be Ripe* obviously resembles John Cowper's in that both brothers at the end somewhat melodramatically kill off their protagonists in the same part of Sussex. But the resemblance is more extensive. Predominantly in Llewelyn's novel, briefly in John Cowper's, the restrictive character of English social life is attacked. So the Englishness of Sussex is not all idyll and vision. Mrs Shotover is condemned for living by false values, by what matters to polite society. It turns out that she is not alone in being condemned for her English values. In Atlantic City Elise Angel rounds on Richard:

I hate all you English. Your feelings are clotted up with clods of earth—gross, thick, heavy clods of earth! Not one of you can be clear and free and honest. You worship what *is*, just because it *is*. It's worse than materialism, it is absolute deadness! And what's more you're not content until everyone's as dead as you are. Dead words, dead sentiment, dead hearts! You've no real courage in you . . . without courage everything becomes initials written on sand!

When Hardy visited Montacute he wrote in the archives in the Robbers' Castle: "Thomas Hardy, *a Wayfarer*". Wayfaring is dominant in Powys's own life-illusion and is certainly a theme in *After My Fashion*. The wayfaring idea runs the risk of anachronism but in John Cowper's hands is more a philosophical idea, a means of focusing on those elements outside the boundaries of social routine—memories, associations, imagination—which should

figure much more often than they do in our appraisal of what is real. The ordinary, everyday, public world is not, for Powys, "all there is" nor indeed a significant part of "what there is". Wayfaring in this sense defines Richard Storm as it does many a subsequent Powysian character. Their quests are their realities, which are not the social English world, the imperatives of "Granny" Shotover.

Hostile readers may think that in the light of the established greater works I am reading too much into this novel. How, for instance, is bad writing particularly in the Sussex chapters, to be explained? Sussex is done in the language of Victorian poetry, in the language (not, I think, of Keats but) of Tennyson and Swinburne. Something of the enervating afternoon of "The Lotos-Eaters" hangs over it. The immemorial elms grow again around Selhurst; Sussex is replete with maidens, damsels and the other poeticisms that comprise an outworn literary idiom. Here indeed is "the idiocy of rural life" but lived by people with no connection with the land. Sussex was ripening nicely for the arrival of Cold Comfort Farm on its literary map.

But as often with John Cowper, a "crafty fox" (his description), matters are not this simple. For one thing the poeticisms, largely confined to Sussex, are expressive of Storm's own condition. The Tennysonian periods give way in New York to a tauter, more vigorous style appropriate to the new artistic growth of Greenwich village. Here is a foretaste of the precision that is characteristically scattered through the later novels, notwithstanding their longwindedness. In the scene for example on the New York waterfront where Richard and Karmakoff discuss politics, Marx's theory of revolution is gathered up and amply delivered in the space of a single sentence. And this: "the massive reticence of London" succinctly captures the character of that city.

The New York chapters partly function as a critique of the Sussex ones, for among other things *After My Fashion* is about art and its creation. The Sussex scene is not

nature done for its own sake as the outmoded literary language may wrongly suggest. The natural landscape is not enough. Richard had come to see its insidious side, how it had lent itself "to the process of spiritual deterioration" even before his departure for New York. The New York chapters are good partly because in them and in himself John Cowper is fighting the strong connection that has held between the English countryside and English letters. The conflict is brought into the open when Elise attacks Richard:

'I've been reading those poems of yours,' she said . . . 'and I cannot say that I think they're worthy of you. They are so overloaded with sensations that one doesn't get any emotion at all from them.' . . .

'What do you mean by sensations?' said Richard . . . 'The whole purpose of what I've been writing is to get into it the very essence of the English country—and that's a "sensation" isn't it?'

'It may be to an Englishman, my dear,' she replied. 'It isn't to me. All this indiscriminate piling up of flowers and trees and grasses, all this business about lanes and fields, seems to me just heavy and dull. It seems to get into the way of something.'

'That's because you're an American,' he threw at her indignantly. 'Any English person reading what I've written would be

reminded of the happiest moments of his life.'

'And what are they, if I may ask?' . . . 'It's no use trying to explain to an American things of that kind,' he said. 'The happiest moments of a person's life in England are associated with old country memories, with just those lanes and gardens and fields that you find so dull. If you don't care for things like that, of course my poems are nothing to you!'

'But my dear Richard,' cried Elise, 'surely the whole purpose of art is to make such impressions universal, so that everybody feels them? If you're content to write about ponds and ditches for the benefit of English people—well! you may please yourself of course, but I cannot allow you to call such a thing *art*. It is the merest personal sensation of one individual!' . . .

'Isn't art always a personal sensation?' he protested. 'Not a bit of it!' cried the dancer. 'Art's an emotion not a sensation. It's an emotion that expresses the only really impersonal thing in the world.'

Powys knows about the impersonality of poetry, about the then-revolutionary doctrines of Pound and Eliot which have played a major part in making the manner in which he sometimes writes about Sussex seem outmoded. But the conflict is in the novel. Powys is big enough to encompass contraries.

Emyr Humphreys

A Perpetual Curate

The manufacture and proliferation of myth must always be a major creative activity among peoples with high expectations reduced by historic forces into what economic historians like to refer to as 'a marginal condition'. Not the least creative among such activities is a preoccupation with pedigree. Here in fact myth and history mingle. Thus when the Wars of the Roses had virtually exterminated the flower of Anglo-Norman chivalry, the genealogies of the Tudors and their social climbing followers arrived to fill a notable gap. It was after all more distinguished to be descended from Brutus than from a brutal barbarian like William the Conqueror, even if the line of descent involved some strange deviations among the mountains of Wales.

When the Welsh aristocracy penetrated the reconstituted Tudor English networks of power, they brought with them a generalised sense of ancestor worship which, with the passage of time, easily lent itself on the one hand to institutionalised snobbery, and on the other to the vague romanticism and antiquarian interests of a prosperous England of the eighteenth century, burgeoning forth into the first British Empire based on mercantile capitalism. When a fortunate young man on the Grand Tour was taken up with the cultivation of his sensibilities among the ruins and the grandeur of the classical past, he could not have been unaware that it was ruthless land enclosures and the profits of the slave trade that were paying the expenses: he just chose not to think about it. The iron laws of economics were not an attractive part of history. They had little excitement to offer compared to painting ivy-covered castles in arcadian landscapes or contem-

plating mortality on a full stomach in a melancholy churchyard.

When he returned from the Grand Tour it was an agreeable surprise to discover that there would be no reason at all for him to conceal the existence of, for example, a Welsh grandparent. The lordly flights of the imagination indulged in by Tudor genealogists had percolated nicely down the social scale to give an extra nudge to the cult of the picturesque. In this sense the druids were very well-connected and as fine a subject for the amateur of poetry and painting as anything in classical antiquity. They were also more mysterious, tinged with tantalising mythologies and therefore more romantic. Thus came about a revived interest in the land of Wales and in the Welsh language. What could be more picturesque, and indeed more picaresque, than the survival, in this comparatively accessible corner of the world's newest empire, of a peasant people largely ignorant of English, using an ancient tongue that some insisted was as venerable as Hebrew and as old as the druid's circles.

There is no better example of this development than the relationship between the young Sir Watkin Williams Wynn II and the unhappy curate Evan Evans. The founder of the Williams Wynn dynasty had been an Anglesey cleric with an interest in the law. His son had risen to be Speaker of the House of Commons and had married into the network of old families in North Wales. Sir Watkin Williams Wynn I, had been a Jacobite and his home had been the centre of the secret Circle of the White Rose. But his son showed more interest in the arts than in politics, and he delighted in his friendship with Sir Joshua Reynolds,

George Frederick Handel, and David Garrick. He wished to be known as a generous patron of the arts, and to prove his interest in the native tradition he became the second President of that influential London-Welsh organisation, the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion.

Evan Evans was a farmer's son from Cardiganshire. It is not unlikely that his pedigree, as pedigrees went, would have been every bit as good as Sir Watkin's. He was educated at Ystrad Meurig school, a distinguished institution in 18th century Wales, and Merton College, Oxford. Before going to Oxford he came under the influence of the redoubtable Lewis Morris (the greatest of the Morris brothers, who inspired his brother Richard in London to found the Cymmrodorion). Evan Evans found the confidence to take up the practice of traditional poetic art, to devoting his life to scholarship and the collecting and copying of ancient manuscripts. He entered holy orders in 1754 and was licensed to his first curacy at Manafon in Montgomeryshire. In less than a year he moved to a curacy in Kent and the peripatetic nature of his life-style began its unsteady progress. He served as a curate in at least eighteen different parishes and spent brief intervals in both the army¹ and the navy. His obsession was the discovery and the copying of any ancient manuscripts that might have something to do with the history and the literature of the Welsh. His weakness was for strong drink; not uncharacteristic of his profession or his time. Dr Johnson described him as a "drunken Welsh curate" and it would be easy enough to declare that like so many Celtic poets of his kind he was obliged to take to the bottle as a supplementary invocation of the Awen, the Muse in charge of the spirit of inspiration. But the origin of the habit is far more likely to lie in the condition of a disinherited culture than in any racial or individual weakness.

Drink made the curate aggressive. His bardic name was Ieuan Brydydd Hir (Ieuan the Tall Poet), as well as Ieuan Fardd. A fellow poet and member of the Cymmrodor-

ion describes him in a tavern in Caernarfon, where they had a row.

He was very ragged . . . He called a volley of opprobrious names and epithets upon me; that would have been a valuable acquisition to Billingsgate College . . . I noted three remarkable features about Ieuan—his pride, his bad manners, and the big scar under his chin.²

It seems that in a moment of desperation Ieuan had tried to cut his own throat. The symbolism of the action was not altogether lost on his contemporaries. The throat was the point of entry for the drink and the proper exit for the Awen. Even before he went to Oxford he had been lauded as a boy genius by such shrewd and authoritative critics as Edward Richard and Lewis Morris. To be a good poet and a great scholar would appear to be a worthy enough ambition, but he soon realised that there was nothing in the structure of the society to which he belonged that could help a young man to sustain such an ambition. He needed the security of patronage, a secure niche in some venerable college, a properly ordered outlet of publication: but none of these facilities existed in any consistent form in the Welsh context. In his life as we see it reflected in his letters, the force that drove him throughout his wanderings was a profound belief in the rich resources of the Welsh language and the existence of hidden riches, sleeping, like Arthur and his warriors in their cave, in the library cupboards of those old families who had begun to neglect their native inheritance. The gentry for their part were inclined to treat him as a joke or an irritation.

Dear friend . . . of the library at Gloddaith I can give you little account because the knight was set upon shooting woodcock with his friends that morning . . . but I made the best of my brief moment when I got inside, and he was good enough to lend me five of the best volumes . . . This was all I found curious upon so short an examination.³

The great pursuit had its moments of glory. One such is captured by Lewis Morris in a

letter to Edward Richard sent on August 5th 1758. It was meant to read like a despatch from the front.

Who do you think I have at my elbow . . . as happy as ever Alexander thought himself after a conquest? No less a man than Ieuan Fardd, who hath discovered some old MSS lately that no body of this age or the last ever as much as dreamed of. And this discovery is to him and me as great as that of America by Columbus. We have found an epic Poem in the British called Gododin, equal at least to the Iliad, Æneid or Paradise Lost. Tudfwlch and Marchelw are heroes fiercer than Achilles and Satan.⁴

It was one thing to discover manuscripts: quite another to edit them and see to their publication. Evans proved himself a remarkable scholar but there never seemed to be a convenient printing press within his reach, and the tedious method of publishing by subscription took up too much of his time. He had none of the skills of an entrepreneur and many of the local poets and dilettanti with whom he sought to collaborate let him down. From 1771 to 1778 when the parishes where he served were all in North Wales, he was able to rely on the patronage of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn II. He was given reasonable access to the excellent library at Wynnstay and was able also to visit Hengwrt and Peniarth: and Sir Watkin provided him with regular sums of money. He knew that Evans was highly thought of by the famous poet Thomas Gray and by the influential antiquarian Bishop Percy. To look after a scholar who was considered to hold so many secrets of the nature of ancient poetry was a feather in the cap of a man who wished to be recognised as an outstanding patron of the arts. Evans was now able to publish a volume of sermons in Welsh which he considered to be urgently needed: an English poem dedicated to Sir Watkin on "The Love of our Country", by which he meant Wales; to prepare important manuscript material for publication, and to sharpen his attacks on his 'bêtes noires', the 'Esgyb-Eingl', the Anglo-Welsh bishops.

I cannot without the utmost indignation

observe the unnatural behaviour of the modern Welsh clergy and gentlemen of the principality of Wales. They have neither zeal for religion nor the interest of their country at heart. They glory in wearing the badge of their vassalage, by adopting the language of their conquerors, which is a mark of the most despicable meanness of spirit and of a mind lost to all that is noble and generous; and our clergy contrary to their oaths, perform divine service in a language, that one half of the congregation doth not understand; and thus they rob those of the means of grace that pay them their tythes. This is no better than mere popery.⁵

Evans had a strong case. For a century and a half no bishop who understood the Welsh language was appointed to any of the Welsh sees; and the tendency of such career clerics was to licence their English dependents to livings that were inhabited by monoglot Welsh people. Even by the standards of the Pax Anglicana this exploitation of benefices would do nothing to teach the common people 'their duty' and thus the established church could be accused of failing in its duty to the state quite apart from any consideration of the welfare of the language or the spiritual wellbeing of the people.

But as they take upon them the care of souls, whose language they do not understand, I think it is only for filthy lucre's sake and they seem to be to be only tools of a government, that sets religion aside; at least makes it subservient to its destructive and ungodly policy. Such I reckon the depriving of any people or nation of the candlestick of God's word and of pastors who understand to preach it in their own language.

His words are a curious echo of the protests of the Puritan John Penry published by his secret printing press at the end of the sixteenth century. Penry was hanged for his pains and Ieuan Brydydd Hir's fierce attacks against the bishops and their malpractices did him very little good. In spite of the obvious quality of his mind, his excellent intentions and the justice of the cause he was so determined to champion, Evans's devotion to drink and to the Welsh language were insuperable obstacles to preferment.

His career offers a shadowed contrast to those of the two English literary figures with whom he was in correspondence. Shy and retiring as he was, Thomas Gray was driven to hide from the brilliant light of his own reputation. Thomas Percy was a grocer's son who became a bishop more on the strength of his literary reputation than the rather tenuous claim that he made to be the last of the great line of the Percys. The tone of his letters to Evan Evans are a good deal more genial than Shakespeare's Percy's abrupt way of addressing Owen Glendower: but the balance of power across the vanished frontier remained curiously unaltered. Evan Evans's striking lack of success in contrast with the other two is not to be attributed merely to his individual weakness; it also reflects the comparative state of two cultures at that moment in time. Evans was trudging around Wales in an attempt to salvage the mouldering fragments of an ancient tradition for the sake of the dwindling posterity of that tradition. Gray and Percy were showing a cool and cultivated interest in antiquities in order to be able to adapt them to the needs of a culture conscious of the massive political and economic power behind it. An interest in antiquities was just one weapon by which the culture of the English could be exalted to a position of prominence among the powerful and 'polite' nations. When Thomas Gray wrote "The Bard" he could easily have used the gaunt figure of Evan Evans as his model.

On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood
Robed in the sable garb of woe
With haggard eyes the Poet stood.

Ieuan's enemy was not the ruthless King Edward but his spiritual successors, the Esgyb-Eingl, who were in his view doing just as much damage. In Ieuan's experience the great struggle was still in progress, and even the climax of Gray's Pindaric Ode where The Bard, having completed his prophecy, hurls himself over the edge of a cliff, was in some sense a reflection of the anguished curate's attempted suicide. Gray's poem was a great success. The Bard

in his decorous English garb was able to use a mixture of Pindaric enthusiasm and the mythic prophetic gift of Taliesin, and gain unqualified approval because his metrical version of British history renewed the political scenario whereby the Tudors and their successors were still to be acclaimed as the appropriate heirs of the British tradition. Gray was fulfilling the appointed task of a national poet in translating the historic hymn of triumph into contemporary idiom and making a source of aesthetic and spiritual strength available—to yet another generation of empire-builders. His view of The Bard like his view of History was a distant prospect from the comforting shadow of Eton College.

Weave the warp and weave the woof
The winding-sheet of Edward's race . . .

Gray's imagination has arrived on Mount Helicon to witness the daughters of Memory working at the loom of history. But the limitations of his vision make it possible to substitute the loom for the printing press of a public-relations operation, in which history has been neatly stood on its head. There is a glittering invocation of the figure of the virgin Queen that is followed by the celebrated line:

"Hear from the grave, great Taliesin, hear!"

But it is doubtful whether even that shape-shifting genius would have understood the transformation which had taken place; and even if he understood, would have in any way approved. Arthur had been spruced up and sent to Eton and he, Taliesin, offered the post of Poet Laureate which Gray himself had shyly declined. Nevertheless for the English world of the eighteenth century and much later this remained a serviceable transformation. Some kind of literary rough justice had been seen to be done and honour was sufficiently satisfied all round to keep the natives happy. As late as the 1860s, Matthew Arnold could hike around Llandudno with his brother Tom, waving his arms and roaring out at intervals,

"Hear from the grave, great Taliesin, hear!"

as he enjoyed the first intimations of yet another serviceable theory called "Celtic Magic".

Gray and Bishop Percy encouraged Evans to publish in 1974 *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards*. The book was designed to satisfy the growing curiosity among English antiquarians and men of letters about Welsh literature. The impression it made was limited because a shrewd Scottish forger, James Macpherson was already in the field. As usual Evan Evans's publication had been delayed for several years by his peripatetic habits and printing difficulties. Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* had set the poet Ossian off on his astonishing journey into the mysterious hinterland of the European creative imagination. The influence of Ossian the poet became second only to that of Arthur the king. His origin was a similar potent compound of original Celtic fact and judicious fabrication. In entrepreneurial terms, Macpherson like Geoffrey of Monmouth, was smart enough to see that a great market existed for romantic fantasy of Celtic origin and he set out deliberately to supply it.

The Welsh were never taken in and, reassured by Evans's solid scholarship, they refused to accept Macpherson's work as genuine translation. Macpherson counter-attacked with the instinct of a skilled publicist. He went straight for the cultural jugular vein and poured contempt on the Welsh poetic tradition. It was not worthy of notice. Meanwhile Ossian continued literally to ride the crest of a wave. In a few years the young Goethe made his tormented hero in "Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers" recite the translation he had made of Ossian's "Songs of Selma". It is true that Goethe's admiration for Ossian wore off and that he was to observe in later life, "I made my hero quote Ossian when he was mad, but Homer when he was in his right mind". But it was his interest and Herder's that vastly extended that influence of Ossian in European culture that brought the young Mendelssohn as far as the Hebrides in the 1840s.

The modesty and restraint of Gray's muse was in strong contrast to the flamboyant excesses of Ossianic poetry and it was this Augustan English tradition that appealed to the conservative spirit of the Welsh, and particularly the men of scholarship and talent who belonged to the Morris circle. Ieuan's best known poem, his englynion to the ruins of Ifor's court, would probably not have been written but for his admiration for Gray. But the power of the poem derives from his understanding of the brooding passion of the great Welsh elegies of the ninth and thirteenth centuries. The fact of a defeat, with the pain unassuaged by the passage of time, gives a cutting edge beyond romantic melancholy. Brambles cover the ruins of splendour, the halls of song are the haunts of the owl, and the qualities of generous noblemen and a whole way of life are less than stones in the sand.

When Ieuan visited the ruin of the court of Ifor Hael (which is now probably under the M4 outside Newport, Gwent) he was accompanied by one of the strangest figures in the history of modern Wales. His young guide was a stone-mason called Edward Williams, the Bard of Glamorgan who became famous in Wales under his bardic name, Iolo Morganwg. Although the date is uncertain, it was an occasion of some significance. Iolo himself was deeply moved by the sight of the ruin. For him it had an added significance. This was the court where the great poet of the fourteenth century Dafydd ap Gwilym had been made welcome and in his more inspired moments Iolo had already begun to believe that he himself was the eighteenth century equivalent of the great Dafydd and that it was therefore his duty to supplement the known works of that genius with effusions of his own. Inside the world of Wales, Iolo's forgeries had an even more profound influence than the outpourings of Macpherson-Ossian in romantic Europe.

They were an oddly assorted couple, Ieuan and Iolo. The force that drew them together was Taliesinic; a devotion to the faltering Welsh poetic tradition bordering on the demonic in the case of Ieuan and in

the case of Iolo, well beyond it. They were both initiates, the more conscious of some mysterious and even prophetic form of poetic consecration because they were the two living men most deeply versed in the ancient language and the myths and legends and history of what was rapidly becoming a lost world. It was a great burden to bear and, if we are to believe Iolo, the learned curate was very ready to share it with him. In a letter to Owain Myfyr, a well-do-do London Welshman who was assistant secretary to the Society of Cymmrodorion at the time and later to become its guiding force, Iolo wrote,

Ieuan the priest and the poet is now minister at Maesaleg, but he will not find there a single Ifor Hael. The poet has become a very sober and religious man, but his worldly state is very low. I believe he must be the poorest man in his profession in the whole island. It would be no great expense for the Cymmrodorion to present him with eight or ten pounds, which kindness would be of great benefit and a service to him at this point in time.⁶

In tracing their dealings with each other, the reader has the impression that Iolo is handling Ieuan with a pair of tongs. He

needs the authority of the older man to re-inforce his own position. They are both South Walians and Iolo is well aware that a life time of disappointments has given Ieuan a deep seated suspicion of the North Wales literary establishment, of the Cymmrodorion, and an irrational hatred of English Bishops. These are weaknesses that he would be very ready to exploit for his own purposes, but he is equally well aware that Ieuan Fardd is not a man to be manipulated, and that these transient passions would pale into nothing alongside his scholarly devotion to the truth. The drunken curate who had stubbornly refused to accept the Ossianic forgeries, would never have allowed a similar activity to flourish inside the field of Welsh antiquities that he had spent a lifetime cultivating. Iolo had good reason to keep a sharp and respectful eye on the movements and welfare of the older man. As long as the Revd. Mr. Evans was alive, he was obliged to keep a tight rein on his impetuous imagination. It was not until Ieuan was safely dead and buried that Iolo could retire to his bardic lodge to manufacture the mythological sustenance of nineteenth century Wales.

Notes

¹He was only four days in the army. "This is to certify that the bearer, Evan Evans, was enlisted in the 34th Regiment of Foot, but being disordered in his mind, and finding him to be the Rev. Mr. Evans, is hereby discharged . . . OGLE, Captain, 34th Regt. of Foot, London, April 6th, 1768."

(Panton MS. 74, quoted Saunders Lewis, *A School of Welsh Augustans* (1924), Bath, 1969, p. 145.)

²Robin Ddu o Fôn [Robert Hughes, 1744-1785, schoolmaster and barrister's clerk] in a letter to Owain Myfyr [Owen Jones, 1741-1814, wealthy London skinner and patron of Welsh letters. Married

at 60 and fathered six children. Collaborator and patron of Iolo Morganwg].

³"Additional Letters of the Morrisises of Anglesey", *Y Cymmrodor*, Vol. XLIX, Part Two, pp. 521-522: Evan Evans to Richard Morris.

⁴Ibid., Vol XLIX, Part One, p. 348: Lewis Morris to Edward Richard.

⁵The Grievances of the Church in Wales (N.L.W. 2009) quoted in Llythyr Ieuan Fardd at Ddafydd Jones, from Aneirin Lewis, *Llên Cymru*, July 1951.

⁶*Iolo Morganwg*, G. J. Williams, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1956, p. 372 (letter in Welsh).

John Hodgson

On Reading *Porius*

Opinion among Powys scholars—if not readers—is moving towards a belief that *Porius* is the greatest of John Cowper's novels. Morine Krissdottir in her book, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, gives convincing reasons why this *should* be so, and her judgement is confirmed by readers visiting Colgate University Library in increasing numbers, in search of the complete unpublished text of the novel. It is an opinion which Powys himself certainly shared. When we read that "Personally I think it beats that Glendower book of mine hollow",¹ or that "It suits me better than anything except perhaps 'Morwyn'",² this enthusiasm may be ascribed to Powys's well-known zest for the work in hand at any one moment. Yet it is true that he spent over seven years on *Porius*, which is over twice as long as on its nearest competitor (*Wolf Solent*), and over four times as long as on *A Glastonbury Romance*. *Porius* seems intended as a crowning achievement.

Something of the conditions under which the book was written can be gathered from Powys's letters.

I took my final page, i.e. (. . .) p. 2811 in my long sprawl up to the Gaer here & snugly ensconced against the north-east wind = that deepest *stone-craters* in the wall or stone-chambers & waited for some sort of Inspiration *in situ* for my last paragraph & I really *did* get it! . . . but I make no conjecture as to whence it came!³

In another letter, Powys writes of "a sort of mossy rocky precipice with a cave I wanted to experiment with (I mean *in!*) in view of my Romance of Corwen in 499 A.D."⁴ To "experiment" in a cave suggests more than a novelist's customary collection of background data, and hints at a diary-like record of experience and sensation in as

immediate a state as possible. The habit of writing "in situ" could be pushed to no further extreme, and no doubt encouraged the minute density of the novel's attempts to fixate fugitive impressions of air, moisture, vegetation and light.

The writing of the novel was begun out of doors, in ritualistic fashion. In this letter of 1951, ritual is typically tempered by mock-ritual.

But just as I was turning to descend being content to be hearing *curlews and cuckoos in the mist* I was seized by a *psychic compulsion* which said: "Go to the sheepfold (at the final turn S.W. towards Liberty Hall) where at a *stone standing-desk* for the larger stones of its walls are smooth and flat—" where the first sentence—the first *page* of *Porius* was written in 1942 *Jan 18 nearly ten years ago!* Well at the Druid Stone a "*Compulsion*" made me, tho' tired, ascend the Purgatorial Mount till I reached the *Stone Desk* of Jack the Talker the Preacher the Verbose One the Arch-Welsh-Humbug. And when I got home *cocksure* certain I wd. find *Porius what did I find? Nothing at all but an "ad"* from Swan & Edgar Aunt Kate's favourite shop!!! But at *Noon the Book came: A Perfect Page-Proof!!!*⁵

While the results of these years of labour are gaining critical respect everywhere, I do not think that *Porius* has yet won the love and enthusiasm of readers in the way the major Wessex novels have. There is the murmured complaint that *Porius* may be great, but it is certainly unreadable. Many admit to not finishing it at first attempt, myself among them. In 1975 George Steiner wrote, "*Porius* is a novel one attempts, retreats from, returns to with a deepening sense of magic and authority."⁶

Morine Krissdottir's book provides a splendid substantiation of this "sense of

magic and authority." *Porius* is expounded as an alchemical opus "written as a secret doctrine with a "secret" embedded in it that Powys made sure would remain hidden to all but the few willing to follow him on his magic hunt." No more can the complexities of the novel be dismissed as the results of confused narrative powers in old age.

But the book now seems more daunting than ever, reserved for initiates of elaborate occult disciplines, and I think there is a danger that *Porius* may be hived off into a critical hiding-place (or "esplumeoir") of its own.

It appears to me obvious that, if Powys intended *Porius* as an alchemical opus, he also wished it to be accessible in plainer terms as well. Writing about *A Glastonbury Romance* in the American magazine, *Modern Thinker*, he was anxious to reassure readers that his book could be enjoyed without specialist knowledge:

It has interested me also to re-create the profound symbolism of the Grail mythology and to discover it re-enacting itself in various significant groupings of animate and inanimate existence in these modern days. All this, though it will clearly reveal itself to anyone with a *penchant* for mythology, does not in any way interfere with the philosophy of the book or become an encumbrance to any reader's enjoyment and understanding of the conflict in it between its two main forces.⁸

That *Porius* may be read on a plain as well as a magical level not only accords with everything we know of the kind of relationship with his public that Powys desired, but also, of course, with alchemical teaching, where the philosopher's stone is something at the same time hidden and obvious, as it is in Taliessin's poem:

The centre of all things, yet all on the surface,
The secret of Nature, yet Nature goes
 blabbing it
With all of her voices from earth, fire, air,
 water! (418)

After reciting his poems, Taliessin has the habit "of entering into an intimate relation with some small inanimate object that happened by the purest chance to be just

then under his eye!" In this case, it is a straw of wheat. In the chapter "Culture and Nature", in *The Meaning of Culture*, Powys elaborates a belief that the souls of things are apprehended from their appearances. "... the soul of Nature dwells upon her material surface rather than in any 'spiritual' depths." "It will be noted that this magic of the universe always emanates from the surface and always returns to the surface."⁹ Hence there is a certain appropriateness in Powys's curious combination in *Porius* of alchemical magic with the imitation of the surface of life which prose fiction provides.

The 'surface' of *Porius* is very curious indeed. Angus Wilson¹⁰ suspects that the kind of novel where "stones and vegetables begin to speak", to which *Porius* points, is not possible. The reader who has successfully hacked his individual path through the forests of Edeyrnion is likely to find *Porius* something of an impossible object—but the experience will have been too vital to permit the cool judgement of 'failure'.

The undergrowth is certainly very dense—and we have this in the very first chapter. It is not the only hard beginning in Powys: the opening of *A Glastonbury Romance* is also hard, where we meet all those people at Canon Crow's funeral, only to have them disappear for a hundred pages. But *Porius* is very tough. There are the different races—the Romans, the Brythonic Celts, the forest-people, the Gwyddyl, the Ffichti, the Gwyddyl-Ffichti, the Cewri, the survivors of lost Atlantis and the Coranians. There are the individual people as they pass through *Porius*'s head with their great-grandmothers' marriages and dead foster-mothers. These people too are met in every aspect of human behaviour, from the public spheres of politics and war, to their religions and philosophies, to the privacies of love and the remotest retreats of introspection. Matters are not helped by the wonderful pervasive 'atmosphere' of the book, with its mist and autumnal drag. It is quite easy for this opiate mist to lull the reader's attention; getting lost in Edeyrnion is a pleasure in its own right, but I am not sure it is a legitimate one.

The difficulty is one of dramatic focus. What is the central action? There is none, and this is because *Porius* is *the* multiversal novel, and this affects our reading in disconcerting ways.

Most novels may be imagined as plays enacted on an old-fashioned box-stage, with a proscenium arch. The focus is on the human actors, and the scenery, more or less impressionistically represented, recedes away in a diminishing perspective. Trees and buildings, the stage tells us, are less important than people. And as for gods, if they exist, they are invisible spirits, who operate in the minds or souls of the characters.

In *Porius*, there is no sense of perspective. Gods and people and insects and bits of fungus are all there, and if—for *we* are people—we try to apply ordinary human perspective to it all, we find there is no generally accepted dramatic distance. We swoop from one kind of focus to another. This is a consequence of the multiverse, where everything is a personality, and has the same value.

We know that Powys read Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and that a lot of Spenglerian ideas went into *A Glastonbury Romance*. Spengler says of the consciousness of primitive man:

The unlimited multitude of antique gods—every tree, every spring, every house, nay every part of a house is a god—means that every tangible thing is an *independent* existence, and therefore that none is functionally subordinate to any other.¹¹

Hence the strange impartiality of minute observation in Powys. We are used to this to some extent in earlier novels—but in *Porius* it is carried to such an extreme that it is often hard to decide whether, on any one page, we are most interested in myth or politics or bits of twig.

Witness the difficulties of a reader who first thinks of *Porius* as a gusty historical novel, full of explicit action. Of course there are always impulses in Powys to good, thrilling drama à la Walter Scott, but now when he comes to a scene of dramatic action, as when *Porius* kills twenty Saxon

warriors in about as many lines, there is no busy, competent kindling of suspense and expectation. Instead Rhun's dog licks a dead mare's nose,

about whose nostrils and eye-sockets crawled several black ants, while a tiny brown insect whose identity, had *Porius* tried to verify a matter of such sub-human interest in that dim light, would have struck him as belonging rather to the race of beetles than to that of flies, kept approaching the slippery surface crossed by the dog's devoted tongue and then again precipitately retreating. (558)

So much for war. And in presenting a "multiversal" view of reality, it is the normally central political and military area of the historical novel which Powys crowds out most. The political action of *Porius*, such as it is, seems most faulty. The ostensible framework of the novel is the Saxon invasion of Edeyrnion, and the response of the principality to Arthur's attempt to unite Britain against these invaders. Yet, because there is so much else going on, we are only intermittently aware of the pressures of war upon daily life, while the vagueness of Powys's military dispositions means that we can never be sure how near the Saxons are at any time, or in what force.

More seriously, the invasion appears largely irrelevant to the development of the morality of innocent anarchy in the book, and to compromise this theme. Is the Saxon invasion an unmixed evil? One of *Porius*'s ambitions is to join the Arthurian forces to clear Britain of the Saxon, though it is not clear whether the liberation of Myrddin Wyllt makes this unnecessary. Of those few Saxon crimes we see, the corpses of Cadawg and Auntie Tonwen are certainly shocking, but not more so than the cannibalism of the Giants, whose 'evil' is embraced as a necessary opposite in *Porius*'s philosophy, and whose race is held in high mythological esteem. The Saxon we meet, Thorson and Gunhorst, are genial, simple-minded warriors. As Arthur says, "if only we could disarm and cajole these common soldiers of these queer Saeson, and kill off their curst chieftains, we'd have as good and as law-

abiding a set of colonists among us as any” (366).

Socially, the most admired race are the forest people, with their placid matriarchy. Their political leaders are the three Mod-rybedd, and Auntie Yssylt’s pathetic attempt to ally her house with the Saxon, out of fear of the growing empire of Arthur, wins a certain sympathy.

Does Arthur win any sympathy at all? The “clever, worldly, and subtle” Arthurians are treated with scorn, and why should *Porius* nourish hopes of joining the likes of the effete, over-civilized Galahalt and Mab-sant ab Kaw. It is clear that Powys uses the Arthurian court principally for non-political purposes, and the court is most memorable as “an enchanted circus of horses and pretty ladies”, the home of the seductive Nineue and Gwendydd, and a successor to the many other enchanted theatres and circuses in Powys. But how does Myrddin Wyllt square his anarchism with his post as emperor’s counsellor? “The Golden Age can never come again till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to un-make themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves!” (276). Because this anarchism runs throughout the book, the reader cannot give very much more attention to political affairs than does *Porius* himself when he inherits the principedom, beyond mourning the extinction of those splendid Three Aunties. Perhaps Powys, in this political tangle, is demonstrating the instability of political loyalties, but it seems more likely that the political narrative only provides dramatic skirmishes at certain points, and that Powys is not wholeheartedly committed to its implications.

But Powys *is* wholeheartedly committed to the creation of an historical and social world. While he delighted in the “beautiful, a heavenly *blank*”¹² which fifth century British history offered him, he clings in obsessive fashion to those tiny shards of the past which do exist, building his novel upon those two little stones with their opaque inscriptions, the famous *PORIUS* stone and the *CAVOSENIARGII* stone in Llanfor

churchyard.¹² Rhys’s *Lectures on Welsh Philosophy* and *The Welsh People* are ransacked for a vision of pre-Aryan Welshness, with hints of migrations from Iberia and North Africa.

Enclosed within the novel, Powys’s loving creation of a vanished domestic life and culture certainly is convincing; the reader may instinctively feel that the fifth century was not quite so civilized as Powys paints it, but there are no real historical grounds for argument.

Nonetheless, Powys’s “multiverse” also invades the social world of the novel, and its whole way of looking at humanity.

After his encounter with the giants, *Porius* experiences a curious ecstasy:

This ecstasy included every ecstasy he had ever had. (. . .) It was a feeling, he decided later, that embraced the whole world as if it were something under water: something that included not only staring eyes and pieces of bone, but ourselves also, as if we lived under water and saw ourselves, and everybody else, as weeds, stones, reeds, minnows, newts, water-beetles, mud! (TS. p. 1009).

How often the world is like this in *Porius*; Powys’s angle on things is at times wholly non-human. *Porius* especially is conscious of a sub-human point of view: “. . . his mind seemed more and more able to regard everything that was happening with the sort of clouded interest *from below*, such as vegetable life would feel for animal life, and animal life for human life.” (384) He looks at Myrddin Wyllt’s eyes with “an interest rather of a boy in a green beetle than of a Christian in the windows of an immortal soul.” (63)

Since one of the most important features of *Porius* is a certain blurring of the distinctions between human and non-human, it is worth emphasizing the many successes of characterization of a more orthodox kind. There are dramatic confrontations and lyrical interludes which show Powys a long way from the nervous peculiarities of many of his characters. The beautiful, domestic scene in the cave between those very aged lovers, Cadawg and Auntie Tonwen, shows

him 'elemental' in the simplicities of human behaviour as well as in his love of the material world. This scene may have been especially valued by Powys—for in cutting the book he left it in, although it contributes nothing to the forward movement of the novel nor the alchemical plan. There is the delightful, straightforward romance of Gwythyr and Nesta, or the more thwart confrontation between Rhun and Morfydd, where Rhun makes advances to Morfydd because he does *not* love her, and Morfydd resists these advances because she *does* love him. The slow pace of the book allows Powys room to analyze this incident at leisure, with splendid psychological understanding, without seeming undramatic.

It is important to emphasize such simplicities, for their presence helps the reader to believe in the more evasive characters of the book. Powys is careful to have Porius himself accompanied by Rhun, who provides a stabilizing influence throughout the novel, rather as Littleton did in John Cowper's *Autobiography* and life. For it is true that much of the characterization is very elusive indeed, in Porius himself, and in those characters who combine human and supernatural attributes—Myrddin Wylt, Ninueu, and Medrawd.

There is a change in the conception of human personality in *Porius* corresponding to Powys's changed conception of himself. In "My Philosophy as Influenced by Living in Wales" he writes:

In my earlier days when reality was either devilish or divine, either attractive or repulsive, and before the appearance of the psychic nebulae that *now* keep tantalising me with hints and glimpses of elements that include and transcend both these simple categories, I used to visualize my 'animula vagula' as a(n) irreducible, un-splittable atom, in other words, as a miniature but impregnable fortress, into which I could escape at will. Now, on the contrary, just as if I perceived some dangerous threat to this *atomic me*, I have myself exploded myself into so many fragments, that they are no longer fragments, but have become aerial waves of mist *through which* the enemy's bullets or

bombs or bolts or spears can pass without affecting me.¹³

This passage recalls Wolf Solent hugging his little hard crystal of personality within, and the good-evil dualism of his novel. In *Porius*, a stubble mist is a kind of agent of psychic change, and we find that Powys has exploded his chief character into fragments.

This will perhaps be clearer if *Wolf Solent* and *Porius* are compared a little further. *Wolf Solent* is a very hero-centred novel, in which Wolf indeed doubts the reality of what goes on outside himself. Powys presents his psychological development with very clear symbols. The Waterloo-Steps face, the man with the white cat, Wolf's father's skull, King Aethelwolf are compared, matched, and opposed to each other. The argument of the book is conducted in very articulate interior monologue. Of course, the success of the novel is in its shaping of very fugitive psychological material to a convincing pattern, but by the time he came to write *Porius*, I believe Powys found his *Wolf Solent* method far too earnest, self-exalted, and evangelical. Porius rejects the whole idea of "life-illusion":

"What I've got to do is kill this life-illusion of mine so that it *can't* start growing again! But what exactly *is* it that I've got to kill? That's the question. (. . .) It's a sort of diffused conceit of yourself; that's what it is; a sort of feeling that to be what *you* are and to feel as *you* feel makes you a person in some peculiar way superior to the people you meet. In reality of course it only makes you *different*. And since, as Brother John told me, according to Pelagius there's *experimentation in values going on all the time* a person who wants to be wise must analyze and criticize even while he obeys, the values he's received from the past." (TS pp. 1243-4).

Porius's capacities for analysis and criticism are certainly well-developed, and so is his habit of obedience. Although, as Morine Krissdottir has said, Powys has created his first true hero figure, he is a hero of most unusual complexion—one who combines heroic action with an incorrigible passivity, a floating on the surface of events.

He marries, or rather is married, the principedom falls to him—and as for his conquests in love and battle, these take place almost in trance. The same is true of his final liberation of Myrddin Wyllt. Porius hardly understands what he is doing, and his career in the novel is less a result of his efforts than a fulfilment of unconscious destiny, or *tynged*; “almost all his pleasure in existence consisted of two parallel activities—his active enjoyment of the simplest sensations of living, and his active enjoyment of the subtlest analysis of life. For adventure, as adventure, he cared nothing.” (TS p. 977)

The pleasures of a reader of *Porius* are similar. Powys mocks the great actions of the normal historical novel, rather as, in *A Glastonbury Romance*, he created a wholly un-serious cosmology.

But even in Porius’s “analysis of life” Powys again frustrates the simpler expectations readers bring into his book. Just as readers who think they have an exciting Arthurian chronicle in front of them will be bogged down in the minutiae of the multiverse, so readers who expect the clear and exciting mental drama of *Wolf Solent* will be disappointed. Porius undergoes no radical transformation from slavery to freedom or ignorance to enlightenment. There is a sense in which the whole *world* in *Porius* undergoes such a transition, but the progress of Porius himself is as serpentine as ‘The Path of Pelagius’ which wanders through the Edeyrnion forests, and Porius at the end of the book is not very different from Porius at the beginning.

Oh, it was a mistake always to be making these rational efforts after order and uniformity when the wisdom of every creature lay in reconciling itself as well as it could to that mysterious mingling of Nature’s purposes with accident and chance which is the only world we know.

That is page 106, but it could be 706. It is important to remember that the action of the novel is contained within one week, within which Powys comes nearer to a “stream of consciousness” than anywhere

else in his work. Powys’s “in situ” writing, his daily log of sensation, may have helped him here. Porius is a man whose psychology is relatively fixed, but his temper and his candidature for the role of liberator of Cronos are tested, and we see how his habits of mind, in particular his ‘cavoseniargizing’, rise to the occasion.

We have ‘cavoseniargizing’ as the key to Porius’s distinctive character. Porius himself attempts constantly to think of his habit in robust fashion:

He had a subtle philosophical motive in making much of this ridiculous word, and in thinking of his secret pleasure in this absurd way, for by so doing he drained it of all religious mysticism and purged it of all spiritual illusions. (403)

It is vital to Porius and to Powys himself that ‘cavoseniargizing’ should be presented as a non-religious activity, but there is what must almost count as a mystical dimension here, whose importance is obscured in the published novel. For it is ‘cavoseniargizing’ which binds Porius to Nineue, and it is Porius’s intimacy with Nineue—and at the same time his ability to resist her total pull—which enables him to free Myrddin Wyllt. Cavoseniargizing is a communion with the elements described in erotic language:

Could a man with the blood of the giants in him embrace air, water, and fire as though they were a cloud, and embrace them without ravishing or devouring any beautiful goddess, as he was accustomed to do with the elements in what he called his ‘cavoseniargizing’? (146)

But this is hardly personally erotic at all, and is much closer to that very muted eroticism of Wordsworth:

... the first virgin passion of a soul
Communing with the glorious universe.¹⁴

But it is Wordsworth written in lower case letters, without the reverence for any monistic “universe”. “Tread amorously the earth”, advises the language of the Cewri, but we are a long way from that physical embrace of grass and water in Whitman’s prose piece, “A Sun-Bath—Nakedness”.

Nineue is essential here. She is a very elusive character, not because of any uncertainty on Powys's part, but because her elusiveness is important. In Arthur's tent, Porius holds Nineue to prevent her from falling. The incident balances Porius's earlier embrace of Myrddin Wyllt, where he had experienced a sense of the prophet's "multiple identity":

But with Nineue it was as if he were pressing against himself something boneless, ribless, formless; something that was a yielding image of femininity in the abstract, the resilient, lithe, magnetic, slippery Platonic Idea of all the evasive allurements in the world that are the objects of impersonal desire . . .

There was nothing of Nineue that was not deliciously capable of being absorbed. And in the absorption of Nineue even for those brief seconds *there was a sensation of the unfathomable and the infinite.* (93)

Here is obviously a being of comparable supernatural significance to Cronos in his Myrddin Wyllt incarnation. Powys, in his note on the characters of the book published in the excellent *Porius* number of the *Powys Newsletter*, specifically dissociates her from "any fixed academic place in any fixed academic mythology" (15). But she is clearly a powerful embodiment of the feminine principle.

There is a constant opposition between masculine and feminine in *Porius*, worth presenting not as an 'interpretation' of the book, but as offering the reader some point of reference in the seething anarchy of the 'multiverse'. It is an opposition familiar from earlier Powys. At the end of *Glastonbury*, the Great Mother, Cybele, is revealed as the inspiration of all the hopes and dreams which have gone before. (As Powys wrote to his publisher, "Don't you think it was a good inspiration to end the Glastonbury Book—in a tone like the very end of the Second Part of Faust".¹⁶)

Discussion of the feminine principle in Powys has been bedevilled by the strangeness of the relations between Powys-heroes and their women, which have relatively little to do with this central

feminine principle. Nineue is, of course, a 'sylph'—but 'sylphs', here as in earlier Powys, are less actual women than projections of the kind of imaginative possession which used to be ascribed to a 'muse'. The feminine principle is present in the imagination, and in nature. It belongs to a mythological region, and we find Powys in his letters of the 1940s very interested in Whitman's "Square Deific", particularly impressed by "Whitman's audacity in making the Holy Ghost *Feminine*."¹⁷ In his introduction to the *Autobiography*, J. B. Priestley quotes Jung's *Psychological Types*, claiming Powys as an example of "The Inverted Sensation Type":

Actually he moves in a mythological world, where men, animals, railways, houses, rivers and mountains appear partly as benevolent deities and partly as malevolent demons.¹⁸

It is clear that the mythological invaded and complicated John Cowper's life, just as the collision—hardly the merging—of the mythological and the naturalistic is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the novels.

In the final chorus of *Faust*, "the eternal feminine leads us on"; in other words, it is never attained. It might be very dangerous actually to catch up with it. One might be put under a stone, like Merlin, or overwhelmed by the undisciplined contents of the imagination, as nearly happened to Powys in his harrowing years at Southwick, where he experienced in their destructive aspect the very powers out of which he was later to create his novels.

I think this is the meaning of the strange game of tag which *Porius* and Nineue play on the top of Snowdon. Talking to Rhun on the mountain slopes, *Porius* says of the "mystery of women":

"I think *their* "mystery" forces them to try and possess us, to surround us with themselves, to draw us into themselves, to make us part of themselves,—in a word to swallow us. But—and *here* comes the extraordinary contradiction—in their deepest selves they want us to *escape* being swallowed! Therefore the thing we've got to do is never to cease running away, never to cease escaping being swallowed!" (TS p. 1561)

The tolerance with which Nineue treats Porius after he has escaped her is described as "a supernatural planetary indulgence totally beyond anything humanly maternal, but not impossible to associate with the boundless earth, mother of the Titans, nor impossible to associate with her who betrayed Uranus to crooked-counselling Cronos, and then again Cronos to the hurler of thunderbolts." (TS p. 1577)

Whatever the status of Nineue, it is apparent that the final arbiter is Gaia, mother earth. We remember that Myrddin Wyllt had to gain the permission of the earth, his mother, before inaugurating the events leading to a second Golden Age.

Glen Cavaliero has noted that the women in *Porius* are of stronger mettle than the men. Porius is dominated by his masterful mother and capable wife. His father Einion is ineffective, and devoted to the goddess of the matriarchal forest people, Ceridwen. There are the three Modrybedd with their natural dignity. One 'masculine principle' to set against the dominant 'feminine principle' is Rhun ap Gwrnach's Mithraism, which collapses under the pressure of his passion for Gwendydd, his attempted ravishment of Morfydd, and his happier fate with Sibylla. This invasion of the feminine upon philosophical detachment is treated with compassionate humour, as with Richard Gaul in *Weymouth Sands*.

For the rest, we have the male thunderbolt-hurler, and the male Trinity. Porius hopes to oppose the fanaticism of Minnawc Gorsant with the feminine principle:

And he seemed to see clearly now that to fight this priest with anything resembling the man's own undying frenzy of love-hate would be impossible, and that the only hope, as had already crossed his mind, would be to use the feminine element in the heart of religion itself; an element that in the end would resolve everything back into nature. (TS p. 1212)

That the rebellion against religious orthodoxy in *Porius* is made from an alternative position of security is evident from the humour of this rebellion; there is none of the shrill anti-clericalism of *Owen Glendower*.

Porius debates the values of different religions at a time of cultural transition (here resembling *Marius the Epicurean*). Where Christianity has no special claim to pre-eminence, the ideas of St. Paul look much odder than any 'cavoseniargizing':

"He feels that Jesus Christ has got into his soul and is there instead of himself. Yes, Drom feels that it isn't Drom who does the good things he does but Jesus in him." (TS p. 1094)

The finality of Biblical revelation, as preached by the Corwen priest, seems equally strange:

"The Lord has spoken, and the Lord has stopped speaking. And *that's how it is!*" (TS p. 1178)

Resolving "everything back into nature" is the overwhelming impression of autumn in Edeyrnion. These sound like comfortable words, but they are nothing of the sort. We are thrown back on that restive, fevered multiverse. The glorious 'atmosphere' of *Porius* with its luxurious, downward October pull, has been everywhere admired. But this earth-mysticism is very different from that of Lawrence at the opening of *The Rainbow*. In Lawrence, the farmers' contact with the land is an assurance of stability. Man becomes simpler, his moral values more straightforward, the 'cerebralism' of modern urban culture has no chance to develop. (The differences between Lawrence and Powys are nowhere sharper than in the different meanings they give to 'cerebralism'.) In *Porius* nature challenges with her deviousness and instability. "Nature is the mother of all extremes", writes Powys in *Dostoevsky*, "She loves to bring forth monsters, abortions and freaks".¹⁹ So, the closer to nature man draws, the more complex his response to the world becomes, the more provisional his moral judgements. Hence the strange rankness of landscape, initially sinister and 'evil'. Powys particularly dwells on traditionally parthenogenetic fungi, which Nicander described in the 3rd century B.C. as "the evil ferment of the earth". "The

central heat of the globe forms them by rarefying the mud of the earth".²⁰ Powys, aware of these inauspicious connotations, associates fungi with the earth's mysterious generative forces; the 'atmosphere' of *Porius* is not just scene-painting, but an enactment of the whole philosophical motion of the book, towards the liberation of 'authority from below'.

"We know only too well," writes Powys in *Rabelais*, "how the sanctity of religion and the sanctity of the family have come to be closely associated with *authority from above*, while *authority from below* has been perverted to mean authority from the Devil instead of authority from the sound and good instincts of the masses of common men and women".²¹

The opposition of 'above' and 'below' in Powys goes far back. Wolf Solent prayed in vain to the stars on the slopes of Ramsgard, but found assurance in the field of gold behind the pigsty. In *Glastonbury*, prayers to the powers above were highly dangerous, and Geard emerged from Wookey Hole to transform the town. In *Morwyn* wisdom came from the depths. *Porius* confirms this sequence, where the fungoid fertility of the earth, of nature, becomes a source of goodness. This fertility is associated with the earth-wisdom of Myrddin Wyllt, and the Pelagian wisdom of Brother John. Brother John's cell seems to sink into the earth, in one of Powys's most extravagantly lyrical passages:

The stones of Brother John's cell descended straight and deep into that same black mud and when *Porius* reached them (. . .) and touched them with his cold knuckles, it was a rough, blind expanse of stone he touched, where miniature armies of moss and tiny ferns and little round-leaved trailing plants and squadrons of grey lichen seemed in league with the swamp and the forest in their slow tireless vegetative determination to go on invading this solitary outpost of human civilisation until they had swallowed it up. (143)

This is early in the story, and *Porius* is distinctly fearful that he "should be carried down into some faintly lit greenish-black

underworld, where one illusion melted into another illusion and where all definite shapes and all definite thoughts shifted and shimmered and waxed and waned in a phantasmagoric mist". (143) This greenish-black underworld is familiar to all Powys readers as the Nineue-haunted Annwn.

What is all in favour of this huge book with its unarresting title as being considered Powys's greatest is its sustained seriousness. For the first time in Powys seriousness of purpose is matched by seriousness of performance. I do not detect any of the famous charlatanism at all. There is no authorial clowning, none of the miracles which are not miracles, the "Never or Always" of *A Glastonbury Romance*. Of course, the greatness of *Glastonbury* is in its very instability; its incongruities point to central dilemmas in modern religious experience. But I think it is clear that Powys did not conceive of this kind of showman's novel as his final ambition.

In the *Autobiography* he records a strange ecstasy upon looking at a stone wall behind the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. The ecstasy had to do with his vocation as a writer.

It is impossible for me to describe it! And yet I never see the least patch of lichen, or moss, or grass, in the veinings of an ancient rock but something of the same feeling returns. Not, however, quite the same; for *that* impression, that vision of "Living Bread", that mysterious meeting-point of animate with inanimate, had to do with some secret underlying world or rich magic and strange romance. In fact I actually regarded it as a prophetic idea of the sort of stories that I myself might come to write; stories that should have as their background the indescribable peace and gentleness of the substance we name grass in contact with the substance we name stone.²²

No charlatanism here. No Powys novel fulfils this early hope of peace so well as *Porius*. And how closely Brother John's cell reminds us of this stone wall.

What is against *Porius* is the apparent privacy of its message. If the questions of *Glastonbury* are appropriate to our age is

this also true of the answers of *Porius*? Does Powys's Corwen Golden Age have much to offer the world at large?

Gerard Casey has put this question in its most necessary and blunt form, in asking whether *Porius* really has much to do with a world which includes "Auschwitz, Dresden, Hiroshima and the Gulag Archipelago".²³ It is barely credible that Powys, perhaps in 1945 itself, should write in *Rabelais*:

A far-off Utopia to some still; *but not to all*. Things may look the same to the superficial eye; but different they are. Not so far below the surface the invisible mole of human destiny is heaving up the soil beneath our feet.

The world's great age begins anew:
The golden years return.²⁴

Of course, in presenting mythical material in a history-less past, Powys is attempting a novel about eternal aspects of the world. The Grail of *Glastonbury* was "a little nucleus of Eternity, dropped somehow from the outer spaces upon one particular spot".²⁵ The whole of *Porius* is in a sense such a descent of the timeless into time. The beginning of the book moves from the timeless down to Corwen, A.D. 499:

"Eternus, Edermus, Edeyrn" murmurs *Porius* on the Gaer watch-tower. At the end, *Porius* steps outside temporal limitation, climbing "across great yawning gulfs of time" to enact a drama of mythic meaning.

It might be argued that, if the post-war age is the one with least access to a Pelagian philosophy, there is no other age which so urgently needs it. Powys's belief in Pelagian natural goodness, in a 'multiversal' reality, and his faith in the power of the feminine principle—these may be the experience of inner truths, platitudes, or lies. They are among those grandiose simplicities which are only so far true as they proceed from a necessity of inspiration and achieve honest representation. Powys's novels deal less with good and evil in action than they explore the potentialities for good and evil in the imagination and cast of mind of the individual. If a writer, in the middle of the twentieth century, can honestly sustain a belief that "bon espoir y gist au fond", his work has a more than ordinary claim for attention. The reader who has coped with the bizarre multiplicity of *Porius* is at least offered the chance of finding Powys's belief just possibly true.

A Note on the Text

Quotations with pages indicated in parentheses are from Macdonald's 1951 edition of *Porius*. Those marked "TS p." are from the typescript of *Porius* in the Library of Colgate University. The pagination of the fragments of the *Porius* typescript in Mr. Bissell's collection, and in photocopy in the Library of Churchill College, Cambridge, is identical to that in the Colgate typescript. It seems clear that Powys corrected, in ink, two copies of the complete typescript simultaneously. Mr. Bissell's pages represent those complete pages not used by Macdonald in the preparation of their published edition. This means, for example, that where Powys cuts a section from TS p. 165 (line 2) to TS p. 169 (line 26), the pages in Mr. Bissell's and Churchill College's collection will be TS pp. 166, 167, and 169. The cisatlantic reader who wishes to approach a complete *Porius* may therefore do so, though he will lack connecting passages of under a page, by reading the published text supplemented by the British TS, and with the assistance of the gloss "*Porius Restauratus*",

prepared by Joseph Slater and published in *The Powys Newsletter*, No. 4, of Colgate University Press.

Notes

¹*Letters to C. Benson Roberts*, Village Press, 1975, p. 92.

²*Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, Macdonald, 1958, p. 142.

³*Letters 1937-1954*, ed. Iorwerth C. Peate, University of Wales Press, 1974, pp. 79-80.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵Letter to Marian Powys, 6 May 1951, MS in the possession of Mr. Peter Powys Grey.

⁶George Steiner, "The Problem of Powys", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 May 1975, p. 541.

⁷Morine Krissdottir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, Macdonald, 1980, p. 130.

⁸"The Creation of Romance", *Modern Thinker*, I, No. 1, March 1932, p. 76.

⁹*The Meaning of Culture*, Cape, 1930, p. 203.

¹⁰Angus Wilson, "John Cowper Powys as a Novelist", *The Powys Review*, No. 1, Spring 1977, p. 14.

¹¹Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Allen and Unwin, 1932, I, p. 403.

¹²Joseph Slater, "The Stones of *Porius*", *The Powys Newsletter*, No. 3, 1972-73.

¹³*Obstinate Cymric*, Carmarthen, 1947, pp. 170-1.

¹⁴Wordsworth, "The Excursion", Book 1, 11. 285-6.

¹⁵*The Powys Newsletter*, No. 4, 1974-75, p. 21.

¹⁶Letter to Melrich Rosenberg, 18 November 1931, MS Colgate.

¹⁷*Letters to Clifford Tolchard*, Village Press, 1975, p. 20.

¹⁸*Autobiography*, (1934), Macdonald, 1967, p. xiii.

¹⁹*Dostoevsky*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1946, p. 97.

²⁰Quoted in John Ramsbottom, *Mushrooms and Toadstools*, Collins, 1953, p. 13.

²¹*Rabelais*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1948, p. 362.

²²*Autobiography*, pp. 199-200.

²³Gerard Casey, "Three Christian Brothers", *The Powys Review*, No. 4, Winter/Spring 1978-79, p. 19.

²⁴*Rabelais*, p. 397.

²⁵*A Glastonbury Romance* (1933), Macdonald, 1955, p. 458.

I wish to thank Mr. Peter Powys Grey for permission to quote from John Cowper's letter to Marian Powys, Professor R. L. Blackmore for his great help in opening to me the Powys collection in Colgate University Library, and the staff of the Library of Churchill College, Cambridge for their kind assistance.

Ben Jones

John Cowper Powys's Literary Criticism: Continuity and Context

Does John Cowper Powys's commentary on literature provide an informed and informative, a restorative, revelation of continuity, and does his commentary have a context in twentieth-century critical traditions? In *The Meaning of Culture* he describes the processes for achieving continuity: "The particular weight of gathered impressions . . . is constantly being made more formidable in the face of the brutality and the rawness of things by this exercise of our will. Our receptivity flows with an ever-increasing momentum along the channel that the will has obstinately dug to receive it".¹ He uses the word "will" in the "sense of a will to select and a will to reject".¹ Let me rephrase it: the will to discriminate, to select and reject, cleanses and directs the processes of sensual receptivity (our "receptivity" of "gathered impressions"). This act of cleansing and directing makes more formidable the "particular continuity of our deepest life . . ." Blake comes to mind here, for whom "receptivity" is an *active* process, as, for example, in the Printing House in Hell section of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Here we find an encompassing purpose: the energy of will directed towards the formation, the sustenance, of continuity. The literary imagination is not alone in revealing this continuity, but it is clear enough that literature is to be taken primarily as a revelation of our "deepest life". In *The Pleasures of Literature*, Powys says: "In books dwell all the demons and all the angels of the human mind".² Literature is revelation, and power also: "A word is a magic incantation by which the self exercises power—first over itself and then over other selves and then, for all we know, over the powers of nature" (1).

If there is continuity hoped for at the deepest levels of experience, might we not expect it in literary criticism? Indeed, discrimination cleanses the processes of receptivity, making continuity possible. Hence, for Powys, criticism is an essential act in the fulfilling of imaginative power. But is it actually there—this continuity—in Powys's criticism?

If Powys did not attain "status" as a literary critic, it was not because he was out of touch or antithetical in all ways to the main stream of criticism. Pound, Eliot, the American New Critics offer uneasy company for Powys. Yet we can remind ourselves that there were areas of similar concern: 1) the importance of continuity and tradition, as shared in a common view of the uses of the past; 2) the seriousness of literature, in the tradition of Arnold; 3) in the case of Eliot and Pound, a spirit of internationalism, including a concern for a renewed vitality for the idea of Europe; 4) the opposition to technological and industrial "progress"; 5) the recognition and engagement of mythic process in contemporary human experience. The least likely candidates for common brotherhood with Powys seem to be the New Critics, with their particular attention to detail and precision in the reading process. Their methods of critical procedure are counter to Powys's, yet their view of an agrarian, non-industrial society—where the value of the individual life, in harmony with the processes of the earth, formed and articulated by the imagination, would be sustained—is shared by Powys.³ It is an area for continued exploration within Powys studies, particularly for those interested in his connections to the United States.

We cannot here develop at length Powys's relation to the theory, methods and achievements of Eliot and Pound, although much could be learned about Powys's achievement by particular comparison with them. Peter Easingwood has already established the usefulness of placing Powys's literary art in a contemporary context.⁴ It was his reference to Donald Davie's *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* that suggested a connection between Powys and Pound, although in a different context.⁵ In spite of essential technical differences, they share a sense of language as both an immediate and historical revelation of a continuous human experience, taking form in diverse languages, words and signs, and delivering to the contemporary reader an awareness of the continuity of the European ideal. If their modes of art differ, they both sense their own achievements to be commentaries on and restatements of previously articulated revelations. Powys would perhaps have disparagingly called Pound an "artist", but even the poet of the *Cantos*, sculptor that he is, can be called "one of the great sprawlers of literature", as Angus Wilson, I assume with affection, called Powys.⁶ There are other connections: the interest in European medieval literature, and in Dante; in the delineation of "culture"; in the solitary life, indeed exile; in Whitman (see Pound's "I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman"); in a persistency to use language—be it English, Greek, Chinese, or Welsh—as a primary effort for human survival. The differences show up particularly in the matter of the art of poetry and in the manner of discussion: Powys, we know, is not known for terseness and economy of statement. That they were, or would have been, incompatible seems likely.⁷ It is possible that Powys had Pound in mind when talking about "Fanatics of the modern school . . ." (see below, p. 41). Yet the list of shared commitments remains, chiefly the commitment to see literature as a continuing process of statement and restatement, vision and, perhaps, revision.

We also find similarities when we turn to

Eliot's criticism. Powys tells us that he knew *The Waste Land* by heart⁸ (a comment reminiscent of Wordsworth saying that he had "committed much" of Dryden and Pope to memory),⁹ and though it is certainly the case that he would be uneasy with some aspects of Eliot's imaginative engagement, he nevertheless was at odds with Eliot on serious grounds. There were theological differences, differences on the nature of the person and revelation of Jesus, on concepts of evil, and on the role of the Church, particularly on the question of "orthodoxy". But even on the question of orthodoxy we should take note of Powys's reference to the Christian saints, near the end of *Psychoanalysis and Morality*. He is attacking the modern concept of the culture-hero, much as Eliot does in *After Strange Gods*: "What a relief to turn from these character-artists to the infinite and magical tenderness of the Christian saints and their profound recognition of the eternal value of every human soul, 'weak' or otherwise!"¹⁰ Their similarities are those shared as part of an ethos: an indebtedness to the new anthropology of Frazer and Jessie Weston, the sharing of views about the recurrence of primitive or mythic events in history—something shared with Pound and Yeats, and received in part, as Donald Davie points out, from Pater.¹¹ The primary text from Eliot is the familiar essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent". There are two passages which I wish to note particularly: first, Eliot's statement on the altering of the past by the present, and secondly, his controversial statement on the role of personality in the creative process.

Eliot explains how, in his view, a new (a "really new") work of art enters into the tradition:

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of

order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.¹²

Powys is one of those who has "approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature . . ." His specific references to this organic unity of literary tradition occur in *The Pleasures of Literature* in which he attacks the "Fanatics of the modern school" who, he says, "love to point out that it is use and wont and reverent piety and liturgical repetition that gives half their glamour to the old writers . . ." Against these "fanatics" (amongst whom he may possibly, and paradoxically, include Eliot) Powys cites "Croce's admirable doctrine that every creation needs its completion by the minds of generations before it can be really mature . . ." (16). Croce's view of tradition is referred to again in the essay on Cervantes: "How profound was the inspiration of the Italian philosopher, Croce, when he said that a great work of art is not *completed* until humanity itself for many generations has set its seal upon it!" (479).¹³ Powys identifies here specifically with Croce. More generally, in his procedure of selection and commentary, he demonstrates his affiliation with an organic and integrated interpretation of history. He shares with Eliot an awareness of the complexity of intellectual and imaginative continuity. As we learn from Powys's essay on Dostoievsky, it is the fate of Europe, of human consciousness, that is being settled in works of literature, and he shares with Eliot the view that the continuity of life has been revealed in history and constantly reshaped in the currency of passing time. This is Eliot's sense of tradition, and it is Powys's. It is stated in the prefaces to his critical volumes, in his modes of selection, commentary and comparison, but it is, as with Eliot, most forcefully articulated in his imaginative writing.

The second connection has to do with the poet's personality". Eliot's comments on

this point, even after sixty years, may still raise a stir. Discussing the relation between tradition and personality, he says that as the poet develops the necessary "consciousness of the past" he experiences "a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality".¹⁴ This is, some may say, totally opposed to Powys's "personal" view of the artist. I do not need to argue for Powys's emphasis on personality; he states it both early and late. But Eliot, more generous in his explanations than is sometimes allowed for, goes on to make the case that the "extinction of personality" is necessary if the poet is to express his "medium". He says that "the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality."¹⁵ It is true, he does not say that the poet *is* a medium: rather that the poet expresses *not* personality but "a medium . . . in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways." If not an invocation of the occult, Eliot's reference nevertheless takes its place alongside Powys's more emphatic insistence that the poet *is* a medium and that the poet's self is something other than his personality. The poet's self is like the magician's, as we have seen, exerting power, first, "*over itself*" (italics mine). Discussing psychoanalysis, Powys says that "We are the creatures of strange unutterable impulses, super-human and sub-human, personal and impersonal. Every conscious soul stands hesitating and faltering on the verge of terrific half-realized powers, among which the imagination moves as an actual creator." Our thoughts are "penetrated by perpetual response to mysterious forces that reach

backward through an infinite past, and forward to an obscure future."¹⁶ In the 1949 Introduction to *Tristram Shandy*, Powys calls the novel the "most *extravagantly personal* of all stories ever written," and adds that "there are few writers whose manner and tone are quite as personal as Sterne's."¹⁷ He has already spoken of Sterne's "Dionysian self-expression" and his "orgiastic cerebralism" (11). Sterne becomes part of legend, and in this sense loses what Eliot talks about as "personality". We may say that he becomes "impersonal". Finally, in the essay on Homer in *The Pleasures of Literature*, Powys says: "There is something strangely symbolic in the fact that both Homer and Shakespeare, the greatest poets among men up to this hour, should have lost their identities as persons" (70). So, whether the narrator be Prufrock, or Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, or the sensitized narrator of Dostoevsky's tales, the omniscient voice who relates the resurgence of ancient powers in modern Glastonbury, or in the Welsh mountains of 499 A.D., or the Aether trying once more to tell the story of Achilles, whether any of these, Eliot and Powys share a common purpose: the poet—the imaginative writer—is the translator, the carrier, the possessor of special gifts, whose responsibility is tradition and continuity, the "sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together."¹⁸ In Powys's commentaries much is made of the man, the personality, but rarely do we encounter biographical, indeed "personal" facts of much importance or reliability. The man he talks about is a "persona", an invented, fictional, or legendary figure whose identity as a person has been lost.

When we look at the relation Powys bore to Pound and Eliot we can make much of the differences, but finally, if we wish to carry out our responsibilities, they are of limited use. We can list obvious and practical differences, starting with prose style, and modes of rhetorical procedure, including kinds of audience, varying pressures of financial survival, contrarities

of political and religious experience. But the placing of these three exiles—two Americans in England, and one Englishman in America—detecting common areas of interest and shared imaginative commitments, serves a purpose in defining where Powys stands in twentieth-century literature, and this place will be established only when his relation to such works as Eliot's *Selected Essays*, for example, or *The Sacred Wood*, or *After Strange Gods*, or Pound's *Cantos*, has been clarified. Powys will not always come off well when such comparisons are made, yet much can be gained from seeing his work in this context.

In the 1915 "Preface" to *Visions and Revisions*, Powys set out some guidelines. They are, fundamentally, anti-critical "What we want is not the formulating of new Critical Standards, and the dragging in of the great masters before our last miserable Theory of Art. What we want is an honest, downright and quite *personal* articulation, as to how these great things in literature really hit us when they find us for the moment natural and off our guard—when they find us as men and women, and not as ethical gramophones" (*sic*).¹⁹ His object is to divest himself of "opinions", and to give himself up "in pure, passionate humility . . . absolutely and completely, to the various visions and temperaments of these great dead artists" (10). In *Suspended Judgments* (1916) he continues: this emphasis on the "entirely personal and idiosyncratic" excursions into the aesthetic world.²⁰ "The chief role of intellect in criticism," we are told, "is to protect us from the intellect; to protect us from those tiresome and unprofitable 'principles of art' which in everything that gives us thrilling pleasure are found to be magnificently contradicted!" (9). There is a certain nobility in such sentiments. The tone is not always sustained in their application. The "Preface" to *Visions and Revisions* starts with a lively brashness, an attack on academics ("their squalid philandering with their neighbours' wives," he says), an idiosyncratic rejection of "constructive" criticism, a few hard words on "modern

writers", an uneasy discussion of "the grand style" with several examples of where it can and cannot be applied, and a final apostrophe to Beauty. His own statement of unity in the collection is this:

If there is any unity in these essays, it will be found in a blurred and stammered attempt to indicate how far it may be possible, in spite of the limitation of our ordinary nature, to live in the light of the "grand style". I do not mean that we—the far-off worshippers of these great ones—can live as *they thought and felt*. But I mean that we can live in the atmosphere, the temper, the mood, the attitude towards things, which "the grand style" they use evokes and sustains. (17)

The problem is that in this discussion of "grand style", which is indeed "blurred and stammered", Powys slips from treating it as a literary style to a personal life style. "Grand style" as a critical term becomes of little use when so applied, and even if Powys is himself satisfied with a loose and general usage, when we come to his essays, the term rarely fits the writers he chooses to discuss. It were "Peevish and querulous" (the phrase is Powys's) to press the point, but one disturbing element of his discussion is his use of the term with reference to modern writers: "It [the grand style] is—one must recognise that—the thing, and the only thing, that, in the long run, *appeals*. It is because of the absence of it that one can read so few modern writers *twice*. They have flexibility, originality, cleverness, insight—but they lack *distinction*—they fatally lack distinction" (13). This early reference to modern writers is especially dissatisfying because of Powys's refusal to name them. Once, however, Powys gets beyond his preface, he forgets most of what he has said. He moralizes, preaches, speaks from the pedestal, cajoles, professes and pleads in a way not so remote from what even then could be called academic.

The rhetorical problems encountered in transforming a performed lecture to a published essay will always be a problem for Powys's criticism. He has not satisfactorily resolved the disparity between the

demands of the respective audiences. We assume the origins of the published essays to be the syllabuses of his lectures in England and the United States for various educational organizations.²¹ Vestiges of performances remain in the printed essays. The problem is not that these cannot be read together, but that for the practical problem of constructing a coherent response, the reader may be struck with a sense of having too much at one time. But, we are reminded again that these essays were part of the University Extension programme, directed to an audience of a particular kind: eager and informed, but intellectually passive, looking for immediate intellectual excitement, not for controversy, theory or scholarship. One is awed by the extent of the material and the directness of Powys's articulation of response, but some things are missing: a sense of concentration, an engagement with particular problems in a given writer (he does, in his generosity, generally defend the authors, at times missing significant points), a closeness to the text (in the manner of Eliot, Leavis and a whole epoch of criticism), and, finally, a consistency of scholarly perspective and diligence. One wishes for a more definite stand on "modern writers" whom he slights so often without identifying, but that may be a problem inherent in his professional status at the time, in his need to perform for an audience. He was, after all, selling "great books", and, perhaps, himself.

Powys shared with some of his contemporaries—including those whom we have discussed—an elitist position in matters of culture and the imagination, and this, too, must be noted. At the end of *Suspended Judgments*, he says: "We have to face the fact—bitter and melancholy though it may be—that in our great bourgeois-dominated democracies the majority of people would like to trample out the flame of genius altogether; trample it out as something inimical to their peace" (434). He then refers to the "instinctive hatred with which the mob of men regard what is exceptional and rare" (434). He has

already said, in the introductory essay, that "it is the typical modern person, of normal culture and playful expansiveness, who is the mortal enemy of the art of discrimination" (5). The passages place him with Pound, Eliot, Lawrence, Yeats, and some others too, in their rejection, for a variety of reasons, of the drift of contemporary democracy. Powys's appeal, at this stage of his writing, to books and to perception based on intellectualized sensuality, offers a resolution different from Pound's fascism, Yeats's aristocracy, Lawrence's blood-primitivism, and Eliot's orthodoxy—a different resolution, but a sharing of views about the survival of art and tradition in a hostile society.

Continuity exists in individual experience, and, Powys argues, the development of an identity depends on the discovery of such continuity. The artist not only discovers but articulates this continuity. Here the term relates to literary tradition. Tradition, rightly discerned, is the collective revelation of the inner life as it has been discovered and articulated by artists of the past. Criticism, then, becomes the task of identifying those artists who have most potently discovered and articulated the inner life. These uses of the terms continuity and tradition are, I have suggested, shared by Powys's contemporaries. There exists, then, a context—shared attitudes and objectives—for Powys's early critical perspective. I have tried to identify this continuity without undermining his own unique gifts, his passion for books as psychic revelations of an essential and deeper self, his boldness in exploring areas sometimes restricted, specifically the area of sexuality (*Suspended Judgments*, "Rousseau"), his appeal for new directions in criticism, and, of course, his own streak of game-playing, as when, near the end of *Suspended Judgments*, having written with enthusiasm on some sixteen authors, he says that he is "drawn instinctively only to two among them all—to William Blake and Paul Verlaine" (428).

It is not possible now to trace the complete course of changing perspectives

through Powys's career, but we may find it useful to trace his perspective and response if we choose a single author. Powys may be "pluralistic", but the same names keep turning up in his commentaries. He had his own "great tradition", and in this tradition Whitman's name is one of the more obvious. Derek Langridge records a syllabus for a lecture on Whitman for the Oxford University Extension programme (1905-06),²² and Whitman is cited in *100 Best Books* (1916). *Visions and Revisions* has the first extended published commentary. There is a longer discussion in *The Pleasures of Literature*, and he takes a prominent place in the apocalyptic concluding chapters of *Rabelais*.

The essay in *Visions and Revisions* gives us a sense of Powys's early critical procedure. It starts with an emphatic statement—two short sentences—that he is going to discuss Whitman's *poetry*. Then, a page on what else he could discuss, at the end of which he reminds us that he is going to discuss Whitman's *poetry*. This is side-tracked, however, when he mentions Whitman's optimism, and he spends a page taking shots at the optimistic Robert Browning, referred to as "Mrs. Browning's energetic husband". Then a brief and single shot at Chesterton at the end of which we are forcefully reminded: "But it is not of Walt Whitman's optimism that I want to speak; it is of his poetry." We settle-in at last, but, with the mention of Whitman's "free verse" he carries out an attack on "modern poets". He tells us that "all young modern poets write alike," and "they are alike", etc. We are now halfway into an essay emphatically devoted to the discussion of Whitman's "poetry", and still waiting. The fifth page begins with a determined intent to discuss the poetry. He mentions Whitman's "magical unity of rhythm", which Powys correctly discerns to be a primary source for Whitman's evocative power. He mentions Whitman's music: "Those long, plangent, wailing lines", and the individual effects "in the great orchestral symphony he conducts". We have had, then, two sentences on the "poetry". He

gathers some examples which, however, do not carry on the discussion of this "magical unity of rhythm". They are, rather a listing of Whitman's evocation of sensations, and the list is given to us imitatively in a typically Whitmanesque catalogue. It is a set piece obviously to be performed. As the essay ends, when we could have expected a discussion of poetry, we have a potentially spell-binding rhetorical evocation of love and hope. In an essay devoted emphatically to the discussion of Whitman's poetry—not other things—we have been given only a part of a paragraph for that discussion. The mistake in his method is that Powys gives us to suppose at the beginning that *poetry* can be discussed separately from other things, from optimism, sensation, love, hope. The reminders that he *will* discuss the poetry take on a somewhat, and perhaps intentional, comic twist. If we want a term for his method, we can say that it may be centrifugal, but the centre does not always hold. The single memorable commentary, other than the put-down of Browning, is the catalogue of Whitman's ability to evoke "the magical ugliness of certain aspects of Nature" (286; 213), that same "magical ugliness" which Powys was himself to evoke so powerfully in his fiction.

The essay on Whitman in *Visions and Revisions* is indicative of the procedures followed in the early essays—the search, carried out rhetorically, for for a controlling sensation in an author, a sensation which evokes the "continuity of our deepest life". In some of the early essays such a sensation is found, but the effort expended can hardly be called economical. When points are well-made they seem to have come about accidentally. They are often betrayed by peripheral excursions.

In *The Pleasures of Literature*, Powys offers a more extensive view of Whitman's work, and he is more intent on the analysis of Whitman's ideas than he was in the earlier essay. The method is still centrifugal, but this time there is a centre: he will speak about Whitman's Optimism. The performance is more moderate in tone, but

more elaborate in its references. The longest single section, taking up more than one-third of the essay (444-458), is an extended attempt to explicate the cosmos in Whitmanesque terms, using Whitman's optimism as an indicator that Being is not *one* but *many*. But Powys is, as sometimes happens, diverted from Whitman, this time into a critique of modern science. He is less than convincing in his discussion of modern physics, although we may credit him with attempting to go "extra-territorial". He attacks "specialization", but gets trapped in its language. Better to have talked about Whitman. When he returns to Whitman's pagan mysticism he returns to what he can do best, constructing continuities with other writers, building a design and a context. Whitman is the "true pluralistic anarchist" (475), mystical and assertive, the medium for the deeper life. His optimism, in Powys's view, is not that of America, or democracy, or the "Average Man", but an assertion that imaginative reconstruction of a desolated, materialized, fallen creation is yet possible, that "there is no position, not even the position of being a god, that is closed to our transmigratory progress" (464).

What mars his discussion particularly is the lack of concentration. The attack on modern science, if faulty in its control of the language, is partly redeemed by its pointed enthusiasm. But more serious problems develop when Powys tries to play the scholar: I cite a fairly long section that begins on page 466. Having discussed Whitman's pagan mysticism, he goes into a scattered commentary on Whitman's affinities with Arnold, shifting in the same paragraph to the theme of supersexual ecstasy, moving, appropriately, to the theme of ecstatic death. Without warning he states his contempt for psychology and pathology, defends Whitman's use of French words, comments on Whitman's audience, and jumps to the problem of evil. He returns to what he calls "the sex question", tactfully acknowledges both Whitman's homosexuality and his "cosmogonic celebration of women". At the point where we are ready

for illumination, for a revelation of the core of Whitman's imaginative energies, Powys decides to discuss Whitman's originality in "moulding words". Here, especially, he needs an editor.²³ The conclusion of the essay moves towards apocalyptic statement, a rhetorical design which, for Powys, has become typical and to which he returns in the books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais. Whitman is one of those who keep creation alive amidst the processes of human decay.

This is the image of Whitman that recurs in the concluding chapters of *Rabelais*.²⁴ I have been sceptical of Powys's association of Whitman and Rabelais. Whitman's connections to the earth do not fit Rabelais's. Whitman is tenuous, grasping, longing to touch flesh and earth. Always, he craves companionship: His sexuality is based in longing for affiliation, in sensual fantasies of secretive mingling, always in the presence of death. The sexuality of Whitman is close to something Powys tries to articulate in *Maiden Castle*—unconsummated desire as a source of primal energy. Wizzie Ravelston is, appropriately, one of those strange Whitmanesque lovers—carnival-rider, something bought and sold, an object of desire, something to be touched but not possessed, to become a memory of desire, a mythic traveller to a new world, a lost companion. These aspects of Whitman do not lead to Rabelais, even the Rabelais which Powys created. Yet, Powys has a point. There is a connection. Whitman is a sign, a presence, an Apparition, linking Rabelais to modern consciousness, fending off the apologists for orthodoxy, for the One Law, for a single-centred world.²⁵ Whitman, like Blake's Los, facing the same enemies, kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble. He is a presence that Powys found reassuring. He quotes, with reasonable accuracy, from Whitman's poem "Me Imperturbe," asserting what he later in *Rabelais* calls Whitman's "sense of unconquerable anarchistic freedom" (394). The passage illustrates Powys's visionary response to Whitman, and we recognize in it the aspirations of the Powysian hero:

Me, wherever my life is to be lived, O to be self-balanced for contingencies!
O to confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accident, rebuffs, as the trees and animals do. (373)

What we trace in these three different statements on Whitman is the development of a perspective on the poet, from an object to be used, self-indulgently in the first essay, into a symbolic affiliate, not unlike what Milton becomes in Blake's prophecy. Here is Powys's comment in *The Pleasures of Literature* on such symbolic figures: "There are two kinds of symbolic figures . . . The inferior kind are symbolic in a gaudy, spectacular, worldly sense, like Beckford or Byron or Oscar Wilde, while the superior kind, like Blake and Nietzsche and Whitman himself, have the power of actually feeling themselves to be great occult Apparitions in the history of our race" (464). We discover also in the progress of these comments what discriminating reading comes to mean to Powys: an act, as it draws out the continuities of imaginative realization, which renews the world.

Powys's criticism has a place in the context of the major critical traditions of his time. The connections were sometimes tenuous, but he was not so eccentric as even he might have liked to think. He was, intellectually, much closer to the shaping forces of the twentieth-century imagination than he was to his own immediate colleagues, to Louis Wilkinson and Llewelyn Powys, for example, who were, intellectually, in a different class. He did not belong to any group of modernists, but he was not anti-modernist. He was against systems (I was surprised, but not disappointed, to find so little of Jungian theory in his criticism). Yet he, energetically and imperfectly, created his own system, and he professed his own exclusive and "great" tradition. As a reader, he was concerned with specific issues and controversies, some, but not all, of them out of his territory: Christian apologetics, scientific speculation, social unrest, right conduct. He was at times tactless and embarrassing in his performance.

He was not, in intellectual matters, without discipline and form. His Age of Aquarius, of which "new era" he appoints Whitman a Messiah (*Rabelais*, p. 374), had little to do with horoscopes, but with a revelation of human history created and discovered in acts of the imagination, in the world as it

exists, in conduct, in intellectual war. For him, as for those critics whose work has some importance, criticism—the art of discrimination—is an engagement in the discovery and articulation of the "continuities of our deepest life". Its function is to ensure, and enhance, human survival.

Notes

¹*The Meaning of Culture*, New York, 1929, p. 14.

²*The Pleasures of Literature*, London, 1938, p. 2.

³See *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, New York, 1930: it has been reprinted by Harper and Row, 1962, with a useful preface by Louis D. Rubin, Jr. The book's twelve essays persistently attack "Progress", the eradication of traditional culture, industrialism and its "unrelenting war on nature" (p. 7). The movement is still controversial, witness the discussion of it in John Fekete's *The Critical Twilight*, London, 1978, and in the response to Fekete's book, for example, those in *PN Review*: David Levy's review in Number 8 and Harold L. Weatherby's rejoinder in Number 11.

⁴Peter Easingwood, "John Cowper Powys and the Pleasures of Literature", *Powys Review*, No. 4, Winter/Spring 1978/79, pp. 29-34. The reference to Eliot's *After Strange Gods*, New York, 1934, is provocative. The lectures which comprise the book were delivered at the University of Virginia. *I'll Take My Stand* (Note 3, above) is given prominence in the first lecture (p. 15). Eliot's description of his journey through the "beautiful desolate country of Vermont" (p. 17) has Powysian intonations.

⁵Easingwood, p. 34.

⁶Quoted in *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, London and Hamilton, N.Y., 1958, p. 10.

⁷Charles Lock, at the 1979 Powys Society Conference, provided useful information about the relation between Powys and Pound. Pound is mentioned only briefly in *Autobiography*. Powys wrote a sonnet defending Pound, presumably during Pound's post World War II troubles, the manuscript of which is in the library at SUNY (Buffalo).

⁸*Obstinate Cymric*, Carmarthen, 1947, p. 121. Powys adds that he regarded *The Waste Land* as "the greatest poem of my generation."

⁹William Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, ed. A. B. Grosart, 3 vols., London, 1876, III, 460.

¹⁰*Psychoanalysis and Morality* (San Francisco, 1923), London, 1975, p. 47.

¹¹Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, London, 1965, p. 123.

¹²T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", *Selected Essays*, London, 1932, p. 15; first published, 1917.

¹³Translation of Croce's works into English was well underway by the early 1920s (I am assuming that Powys read Croce in translation). Powys may have known Croce through his article "Literary Criticism as Philosophy", in *Contemporary Review*, 118 (October 1920), trans. D. Ainslie, in which Croce discusses the "perpetual development of history" (p. 535). Powys seems also to have known of Croce's philosophy through his friend—his "Hegelian-Crocean-Philadelphian 'calamus-root' crony"—James Henderson, discussed in "The War" chapter of *Autobiography*.

¹⁴Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 17.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁶*Psychoanalysis and Morality*, p. 45.

¹⁷Introduction to *Tristram Shandy*, Macdonald, London, 1949, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 14.

¹⁹*Visions and Revisions*, New York, G. Arnold Shaw, and London, 1915, p. 10. These editions have identical pagination, and include the "Preface" which demonstrates Powys's critical procedures at an early stage. Page citation to the Macdonald edition, London, 1955. This edition replaces the 1915 "Preface" with a retrospective "Introduction" which concludes with an invocation of the spirit of Whitman.

²⁰*Suspended Judgments*, New York, 1916, p. 14. Page citations to this edition will appear in the text.

²¹See Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys, A Record of Achievement*, London, 1966, pp. 19-54.

²²Langridge, p. 50 (Syllabus No. 846). He cites also "The actual Walt Whitman", in the *New York Evening Post*, Book Review (Poetry Number), 19 June 1920.

²³A judicious selection of Powys's literary criticism and commentary could be a valuable aid to Powys studies; the editor would need to be both sensitive and somewhat ruthless.

²⁴*Rabelais*, London, 1948. Page citations will appear in the text.

²⁵The apologists for orthodoxy, of one kind or another, include C. S. Lewis, Jacques Maritain, D. B. Wyndham Lewis, Nicholas Berdyaev, even William Carlos Williams. One of the more engaging elements in *Rabelais* is the on-and-off skirmish Powys carries on with these defenders of a closed universe.

Denis Lane

John Cowper Powys, Thomas Hardy, and the Faces of Nature

Readers of his personal and autobiographical writings will be familiar with the extent to which John Cowper Powys developed early in life a deep love and fascination for the realm of nature and how, as an indefatigable, not to say ritualistic, walker, he pursued a life-long meditation upon the meaning and value of the natural world. Strengthened by a cosmic-sense akin to that of Goethe and Emerson, this abiding interest in nature gave rise to the philosophy that Powys called planetary elementalism, a creed that was to put its highest faith in human possibilities and that culminated as "a working substitute for religion"¹ Pantheistic in tone, pagan and atavistic in form, Powys's religion was in fact a particular kind of quietism but one which took not God, but nature (both in its external and universal senses) as the principal object of contemplation.

In his major novels, narratives that dwell primarily upon interpersonal and anthropogenic relationships, Powys successfully transmutes this philosophy into fiction, for its presence reaches into all departments of his thought and all the themes of his novels. At their most reductive level, these themes are indeed no less than various paradigms of Powys's cardinal elemental precept: the right of every individual to a life of happiness and self-fulfilment—an end that he tells us in his essays he sees inseparably linked to a direct mental absorption with nature. Thus, where his novels deal with the concept of self-realization, they lead inevitably and simultaneously to a consideration of the restorative value of contacts with the natural world, and in particular to the appreciation of the earth as a place of ultimate stability.

The term elementalism, implying as it does a purely primal mode of apprehension, gives only a partial indication as to the scope and depth of Powys's philosophy of nature and its implications for his novels for, appropriately, his interpretation of nature is as complex as nature herself. His elementalism, for instance, contains conflicting attitudes toward nature, in which he recognizes her multiple characteristics and her propensity for oppositions; it provides also a distinctive cosmology moulded upon either a First Cause or chance; and, finally, it confers the artistic means, the special techniques, that are, I believe, among the chief conditioning factors in the unique signature of Powys's imaginative art. These latter are at their most patent in *Wolf Solent*, the first of the major novels, where Powys announces the methods he will use more powerfully and with a greater range of suggestiveness in later works: a protagonist who, like his author, is highly sensitive to the ways of nature, a broad pattern of metaphorical language that focuses upon the natural world (and that reaches its apotheosis in a field of buttercups), and the symbolic use of season and setting to record, in this case, the protagonist's arduous journey toward psychic stability.

Throughout his development as a novelist, Powys's dynamic and deepening vision of man's place in the external world is conveyed primarily through the medium of natural description, a term which, although perhaps inadequate, I use generically to connote his many different spatial, sensuous, and psychic evocations of the natural world. Virtually any passage of nature description in Powys tells us immediately that it is mediated through a highly observant, highly schooled eye, the

eye, in fact, of a born naturalist. The minuteness of observation, the perceptive commentary Powys makes upon the phenomena he finds in nature, equals anything we might find in Hardy, the previously acknowledged master of landscape description, and the writer to whom, in his use of nature, Powys is certainly the literary heir.² If, as I have suggested, Powys's novels assert the premise that nature is the point d'appui for an analysis of life, then this was surely a lesson he gained from Hardy, as his now oft-quoted testimonial appears to confirm: "And from T. Hardy I learnt, long long ago, to see all human feelings, gestures, actions & everything else!—my own and everybody's—against the Inanimate Background of Nature".³

The connections between Powys and Hardy are in fact subtle and extensive. Powys, who saw Hardy "at intervals during a period of more than thirty years",⁴ first wrote of his admiration for Hardy in the early critical work *Visions and Revisions*, a copy of which Hardy told Powys he always kept at his bedside. Twenty years later, writing in *The Pleasures of Literature*, Powys's admiration had become deeper and more acute. In one of his finest chapters of criticism Powys discussed Hardy's power of landscape description, his genius for reproducing the "tactile values" of the scenes depicted, and his ability to convey the "palpable essence" of those "half-abstract, half-concrete entities" of dawn and twilight (PL 613). "He saw most things", continues Powys, "under what might be called their *lineal absoluteness*, the imprint they make ere the universal flux carries them away upon the 'camera obscura' of the timeless" (PL 614).

With that mode of penetration so peculiar to him, Powys is touching here upon the way in which, like his own, many of Hardy's novels are formed or influenced by the mood of nature they project or sustain, and upon that remarkable strain of distancing—spatial as well as temporal—that Hardy had developed with such keen assurance. Hardy's characteristic

techniques and tones emerge inconsistently in his novels of the early eighteen seventies (*Desperate Remedies*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and *Far from the Madding Crowd*), but the structure and features of his novelistic method are clear even then. All these novels project a positive view of nature, of her beauty and fruitfulness, while at the same time recognizing her destructive power, her passivity, and her separation from human activity. Initially, these separate images of nature stand unreconciled, but in three later novels—*The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*—Hardy gradually created a coherent vision of nature, a vision of vitality within destruction. This view—the one, rightly or wrongly, for which Hardy is perhaps best known—is a more deterministic view than that of the earlier novels and it is through this that the quality of "lineal absoluteness" to which Powys refers, comes to the fore. The Unfulfilled Intention controls nature, character and plot in *The Woodlanders*, while the heath's message of endurance through gradual evolution broods over *The Return of the Native* (and decrees that any human indulgence of strong desires brings down swift tragedy). In a more complex way, Tess's history implies that nature's many moods and faces form a pattern with human experience.

It is often the case with Powys's literary criticism that his interpretation of another author tells us much of what he sought in his own writing and his words on Hardy are no exception. It perhaps goes without saying that Powys is closest to Hardy in his three early novels, *Wood and Stone*, *Rodmoor* and *Ducdame*, works that stand, like Hardy's early novels, as evidence of his maturing, rather than mature, art. Compare, among many similarities, the closeness in structural function that exists between Leo's Hill in *Wood and Stone* and Norcombe Hill in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where even the detached and panoramic quality of the description is strikingly similar. Later, this same device of using natural settings for the purposes of

narrative structure appears with greater sophistication as in *Wolf Solent*, for instance, or in *A Glastonbury Romance*, where, as the binding element in a vast, labyrinthine chronicle, Powys utilizes the mystical and spiritual ethos of Glastonbury, whose impact, like that of Hardy's more diffuse Egdon, he tests upon his characters. By this stage in Powys's career, however, full and substantial differences are apparent between the two writers. The chief difference may be summarized as being between one who sees from above (Hardy), and one who sees from within (Powys). In general, Hardy's idea of cosmic indifference precludes the sort of empathetic sentience that Powys so frequently attributes to natural forces; indeed, it could be said that Hardy's humans move in a world ultimately set apart from the processes of nature—no matter how forcefully those processes are recorded or felt—whereas those of Powys, at least among central figures, are caught at the very heart of nature's activity. Thus, Hardy's sense of the transience of human hopes set against the sombre power of the natural world runs counter to the sort of mood that Powys generally evokes, the emphasis of which is upon continuity rather than transience, upon cognition rather than inscrutability.

Pivotal to Hardy's method in this respect is his use of the narrator; he sees from above because that is precisely where he positions his narrator. Hardy's narrator moves in and out of scenes; abstracts, objectifies, visualizes or imagines at different points. Or he may become a spokesman for modern man, fully aware of the dimensions of time and place implicit in the scene (as, for example, in the threshing scene in *Tess*). The locus classicus of this approach is found in *Desperate Remedies*, for it is there, in the central episode of the fire, that the narrative reveals the general narrator of Hardy's major novels: namely, a figure devoid of personality or features, but profoundly influential on the fictional tone. In Powys, by contrast, the role of the omniscient narrator, for all its strategic employment in *A Glastonbury Romance* (where

Powys, as narrator, shares easy company with the unmistakably Hardyian "Invisible Watchers"), can be said to diminish in later novels. It is the characters themselves, the interior eyes of the novel, who, in keeping with Powys's belief in the primacy of individual consciousness, are the principal commentators or observers. Correspondingly, Powys can find only a limited place in his major novels for the prefatory descriptive settings so typical of Hardy—those scenes that set the initial tone and heighten the reader's imagination. For Hardy, such descriptions had enormous value in the creation of the moral scheme of a given novel. Much of *The Return of the Native* is, of course, shaped in this fashion: morally, Egdon is the plane on which man works out his destiny, and in its ambiguous relations to him, it further complicates his moral dilemma. If Powys learned this technique, then its full mastery came late in his development. Not until *Owen Glendower* do we encounter such an ordering principle applied with any rigour, where, through a variety of locales, all extensively evoked, Powys consistently marks out the moral tone of the different stages of the narrative. More often, as I have suggested, descriptive passages in Powys are integrated with the developing action or, even more typically, form part of a state of emerging consciousness. One thinks, for example, of Dud No-man's reception of the mystic, immemorial "Sunday smell" of Dorchester, or Rhisiart's response as he beholds for the first time the castle of Dinas Brân. In this latter episode the relation between the observer and the scene is organic so that the natural details themselves operate as psychological counters, presenting Rhisiart's state of mind concretely rather than through abstractions, a favourite device for Powys. In addition, when seen in the context of the novels from which they are drawn, these examples illustrate how Powys habitually aims for a blend of perspectives, creating limited but highly individualized points of view, more personal and vital than that of an omniscient narrator.

This, and the use of a highly reticulated imagery, are what control the Powys novel. Such is particularly the case with *Weymouth Sands* which, in the absence of any overriding dramatic framework, moves forward in streams of consciousness overlaid by, or set against, the cumulative metaphors of the book: the sea, the sands, the rocks, and the settlements of the Dorset coastline; in effect, *Weymouth Sands* is a novel of the margins, its sands the margins of consciousness, where the psychic residua of its characters are confronted and laid bare. Similarly, the archetypal "night journey" of *Porius*, Powys's fullest descent into the primitive and unconscious sources of being, might be described as resting almost entirely upon the complex deployment and interplay of natural and primal images. Such a density of imagistic structure, Hardy, it appears, for all his forceful skill in the use of imagery, could not or did not wish to sustain. Thus, although the austerity of Egdon heath, embodied in elemental images of night, storm, and wind, conveys the theme that human aims and actions are doomed, its depiction appears more segmentally, more widely spread, than would be the case in Powys.

Yet at the same time this very aspect of Powys's work has its beginnings in Hardy. Powys was aware, of course, of the new level to which Hardy had raised landscape description in the English novel, and of the importance it assumed in his works as a means of expanding the reader's understanding of character and theme. Hardy's originality involved relating landscape and the organic life upon it to the interior life of his characters, a method which at its best reaches profound and deeply affective levels. In his description of Graces's flight from Fitzpiers—to take an example from *The Woodlanders*—Hardy creates a landscape that mirrors Grace's complex and subtle suffering as one who was "to be numbered among the distressed" (Ch. XL). Her affinity with her surroundings is reflected in the pull of adjectival forms, such as "spectral", "weak", and "expiring", words that are ostensibly applied to the darkening,

woodland scene that the objective narrator is recording. Similarly (though in more limited fashion), in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba's awakening in a swamp full of decaying fungi, aptly symbolizes the poisoned thing her marriage has become in her mind. In adopting this device, however, Powys went further than Hardy; he effected a transition between description and meditation, and an interpenetration of consciousness and landscape, of consciousness and object, that goes deeper, I believe, than anything to be found in Hardy. Hardy deploys the reactions and relations between mind and landscape in such a way as to throw light upon the personal and psychological life of his characters, but while this is also true of Powys, he differs from Hardy in that he is particularly inclined to direct this power upon visionary exaltations and erotic ecstasies, or to dissolve almost entirely the borderline between human consciousness and the substantial world. Thus where Hardy may view a scene intellectually, with external control and detachment, under the focus, that is, of "lineal absoluteness", (no better illustrated perhaps than in the initial description of "Haggard Egdon"), Powys will view his fibrous—through as it were, the focus of matter, in a manner that is devoid of any spatial or mediating dimension. This, I think, is the great intensification brought by Powys to Hardy's fusion of mind and landscape and its success is everywhere exemplified in the novels: there is Wolf Solent's immersion in the leaves and grass of the Somerset vale as he sinks back into the womb of his "real mother", there is Sam Dekker's vision of the Grail on the banks of the Brue when matter is confirmed as an inlet of spirituality, and there is Catherine's tragic yielding in the Forests of Tywynn.

Had Hardy lived to read it, he may well have appreciated the example cited from *Wolf Solent*, for in fact he wrote a scene that was not unlike it, the scene of Tess's communion with the spirit of the June garden in chapter XIX of her story. While one should not divorce the separate purposes of

these descriptions from the novels in which they appear, they nevertheless present salient differences—arising from their obvious parallels—that point in turn to the sort of novelistic courage Powys displays in his treatment of the identification of mind and landscape. Both passages have certain features in common—a heightened atmosphere, a suspension of reality, and a catalogue of specific sensory effects combined with harmony of imagery and thought—but in the spiritual trance that she experiences, Tess moves into emotional intensity rather than toward the passivity that is Wolf's ultimate desire. In his novel, Hardy manipulates the ingredients of his description to convey a moment of transcendence whereat Tess becomes a transparent medium for the impressions that entrance her, but importantly he closes the passage with his own, or his narrator's, symphonic fusion of the scene, an "imposed" summary of the garden's sensory harmony and unquestioned power. That is to say, if Tess herself achieves transcendence, the objects and conditions through which she achieves this state remain actual and real, and, as equally, the presence of the narrator—for all his drawing back in the passage's sequel—is no less close and dominant. The description is mediated, then, through the exercise of a certain controlled intellection on Hardy's part, a tendency that Powys, who might be called an instinctualist in this aspect of his writing, vigorously resists. When we turn to the account of Wolf's regression (I refer to the last six paragraphs of the chapter, "The School Treat"), we see how Powys gives special force to the otherworldliness of the experience, to its instinctual character. The introductory sentence prepares the way with images that carry miscellaneous paradisaical and mythic overtones—"umbrageous", "phallus", "mystical hill". Thus in time Wolf enters, through a phantasmal "hidden doorway", a world beyond ordinary human experience, a world set apart, where seemingly only the initiate may enter ("no men, no beasts, no birds"), to penetrate to the "secret heart of silence"

that lies within. Because the scene takes place in darkness and silence, the sense of touch prevails, and this, combined with the effects of mind, produces a condition of rarified consciousness. Gradually, as the luxuriance of this world invades Wolf's spirit, its vegetative details—the leaves, the moss, the ferns (images that again bear paradisaical overtones)—lose their identity for Wolf as material entities to emerge, slowly and with absolute precision, as the psychic components of his "real mother", the eternal and primordial Great Mother, to whose presence and influence he readily submits.

In this episode, then, Powys captures Wolf in what is essentially a state of biopsychical seizure; Wolf's responses are directed more by archetypal images ("primal dew", "womb", "real mother") than by concepts, more by instincts ("fallen back", "swallowed up", "sank down") than by voluntary decisions of the ego. In other words, Wolf experiences the landscape *mythologically* (in contradistinction to Tess's primarily spiritual experience), in symbols that are the spontaneous expression of the unconscious as much as the conscious. It is this emphasis upon the original importance of instinct, this heightening of the submerged or numinous aspects of man's psychology, that speaks to us in images fashioned sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, that is the most distinctive feature of Powys's treatment of mind and landscape, and that is, by extension, one of the most remarkable characteristics of his novels as a whole.

Perhaps the sharpest difference between Powys and Hardy, however, exists not so much in their techniques as in their philosophical interpretations of nature. Like Hardy, Powys combined an appreciation of both the positive and negative aspects of nature, but in contrast to Hardy, who saw in the natural environment a body of deterministic "law" dictating the inevitability of human conflict and thwarting human ambition, Powys appears more committed to accepting these ambivalences and even to celebrating them. Where Hardy holds these

ironies in the scheme of things in creative tension—for man, though he considers these natural signs, cannot always act spontaneously in accord with them—Powys confronts them, or investigates them head-on, yet steering clear of any suggestion of the absolutism or dark Immanence that we find in Hardy. For Powys, nature often resists formulation; qualities, rather than rules of nature, shape his philosophy.

It is interesting to note, therefore, that Powys abandons the First Cause—which previously had served him as a personification of paradox in nature (approximating, though roughly, to Hardy's notion of the Immanent Will)—as an explicit novelistic device in the works that follow *A Glastonbury Romance*. No matter how much he was struck in his early years as a novelist with the plausibility of a cosmology of the First Cause, Powys eventually found it impossible to conceive that the contending principles of this cause are entirely equal, that there does not in fact exist "a feather's weight, a gossamer's fall" in favour of the good.⁵ Although he shares (as also does Hardy) that late-Victorian *zeitgeist* that postulates "good" rather than God, he shuns the idea that good can eventually triumph over evil—a fallacy that is one of his favourite targets—rather he suggests that in the cosmos as he describes it, man's best hope lies in his making the most of that "faint quiver of the balances" toward the good and in building upon the resultant potentialities for human happiness. This, I believe, is the primary intent of *Porius* which, along with other critics, I would regard as the summit of Powys's achievement, and I do so precisely for the reason that it is the novel in which he most fully attains harmony between this positivist theme and the medium through which that theme is expressed. *Porius* is no less than a mythic rendering of its author's elemental creed, a novel that is characterized by an intense concentration upon all the orders of the natural world, a quivering sense of the earth, a repeated evocation of primal images, a twilight atmosphere of change and stoical courage, praise of in-

dividual creativity and the striving for self-fulfillment. Significantly, it is nature, and man joining with nature—gaining hope, faith, and courage—that are the essential matter of the novel; these are the aspects of *Porius* that live most in the imagination and that possess the most independent life.

While, then, in both writers we witness a tempering of the human soul in confrontation with a hard, intractable nature, it would be accurate to say that in Powys this confrontation is nearly always ameliorated by an affirmative spirit. Wilfulness, by which we mean the constructive use of the imagination, is praised in Powys; in Hardy it is seen as the ultimate folly. Thus against Hardy's determinism, his so-called "pessimism", we have the brighter light of Powys's optimism. Yet if Powys is optimistic, he is restrainedly and realistically so; again, *Porius* more than any other novel illustrates this. A reasonable, rather than a glowing, optimism, is how we might best characterize the moral legacy of Powys's elementalism.

A corollary to this philosophic difference is found in the extent to which each writer was prepared to use landscape description for the purposes of social commentary. In many of his novels Hardy sets up a patent contrast between urban and rural values, or raises the spectre of increasing industrialization, particularly as it affects time-honoured rural practices. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Hardy stresses the continuity between Casterbridge and its agricultural surroundings, but a tragic conflict between modern mechanisms and country traditions is also strongly apparent (and indeed foreshadows the collapse of community customs and ties portrayed fully in *Jude the Obscure*). Although Powys was not averse to such strictures—as his essays eloquently testify—in his novels he adopts only tentatively this stretching of landscape to cope with moral or social preoccupations. With him, this opposition, while admittedly implied is both muted and restrained. Little is said, for example, about Glastonbury's tin-mines even though

their owner, Philip Crow, represents Powys's closest and severest portrait of the industrial mind. For Hardy the social world and the natural world are intricately entwined, the latter commenting upon and evaluating the former, but for Powys nature is generally a substitute for the social context, or at best the social context is merely an adjunct to the natural. Hence in *Porius*, while it is true that no real urban/rural contrast is possible, it is also true that nature subsumes the social context altogether. Not simply a ruralist, as was Hardy, Powys is quintessentially a primordial writer, expressing in his novels the elemental aim so clearly enunciated in the *Autobiography*: "I feel the deepest thing in life", he wrote, "is the soul's individual struggle to reach an exultant peace in relation to more cosmic forces than any social system, just or unjust, can cope with or compass".⁶ Such, of course, may also have been Hardy's aim, but novelistically he went about it in a strikingly dissimilar fashion to Powys who, eschewing Hardy's trenchant critiques of social values, directs his energies more exclusively toward the depiction of elemental relationships and primal modes of life, thought, and feeling that answer to man's deepest psychological and religious instincts. Quite simply, though a visionary himself, Hardy is hampered by a severity of philosophic belief from indulging in the broader visionary range that is so fundamental to Powys's approach and to his eventual success as a novelist.

It follows, therefore, that Powys's contemplation of nature results in what is ultimately a view of the universe quite different from that entertained by Hardy and, as equally, it leads to a consideration of areas altogether outside the bounds of Hardy's novels. Powys's works, for example, are empowered by the sort of mystical intimations that would appear to be quite alien to the purely agnostic tenor of Hardy's thought.⁷ His Sylvanus Cobbold and Hardy's Clym Yeobright stand at opposite poles in their experience of nature; from Tup's Fold Sylvanus derives a life-renewing

mystic power that permits him to face the satanic miseries of the asylum, whereas Clym, viewing the "horizontal" of Egdon, gains only the insight of a "bare equality" with nature and an overwhelming sense of his personal insignificance. Again, Powys's increasing emphasis on the relationship between myth and nature—expressed so variously in the figures of Enoch Quirm, Owen Glendower, and Myrddin Wyllt—does not seem to be a typically Hardyian concern, though for Powys it gradually assumed a paramount importance. The first complete synthesis of these two aspects of Powys's thought, the mystic and the mythic, occurs perhaps in *Maiden Castle*. Certainly there Powys breaks new ground, both in mood and compass, as he begins to give full rein to his mythopoeic genius. The face of nature remains central to the novel's movement, however, for in Enoch Quirm and Dud No-man Powys portrays, first negatively and then positively, two separate reactions to nature and to the cosmic forces that are hypostatized in nature. In effect we are given two types of mysticism—one vital, the other perverse—the latter of which will be rejected, for in the end it is the organicist response that is ascendant and the earth, rather than a presumption of godhead, that is confirmed as the true fount of human continuity and wisdom.

Then there is the question of what might be called, in a general sense, deity in nature. Powys's "nature", unlike Hardy's—which rests at bottom upon the starkly dehumanized workings of the Immanent Will, is irremediably anthropomorphic and, as an organic entity, is literally populated with deities. Natural phenomena alone are godlings for Powys; so often the reader is made aware of the divinities of dawn and twilight, and the primal sanities of wind and rain, night and mist, sea and earth. In *A Glastonbury Romance* we see the moon as a guiding beacon for womankind, or in *Owen Glendower* as a cult of the deity of the dead. Briefly, in *Owen Glendower* again, the sun is proposed as the chief divinity in nature, though in the same novel, and in both *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle* we

recognize also the dark territory of the underworld. But of all the elemental deities it is the earth that most consistently and most deeply commands Powys's imagination, and it is here, it seems to be, that we are concerned with the very core of the elemental cultus of John Cowper Powys. It is perhaps critically passé to say that in his novels Powys worships the earth, but I believe he does so—just as he worshipped the earth in daily life—and I believe also that we cannot overlook this fact. For me, this consuming devotion reveals not only Powys's belief in the intimate interrelation that subsists between man and his world, but, far more importantly, how Powys views the earth as a psychological entity whose fateful power is still alive in the psychic depths of present-day man. He seems to suggest that the health and creativity of every human being depend largely on whether his consciousness can live at peace with this atavistic and pre-rational stratum in the unconscious. The alternative, asserts Powys, is to be consumed in strife with it. In addition, it becomes clear that because the earth, as the creative aspect of the Earth Mother, rules over all the orders of life, vegetative, animal, and human alike, it embodies for Powys the highest and most essential mysteries of life. And this, I think, provides the key to that power of Powys's natural descriptions whose effect no sensitive reader can gainsay: in short, they carry not simply fictive, but sacral overtones. Not only does he combine an unusually earthen sensuousness with a truly scientific accuracy of observation, but to these he joins a sort of holy rhapsody, so that his writing becomes, in effect, a sort of holy text. The transformation of the earth, the changes it undergoes under varying conditions of weather, season, and light; the growth, and conversely, the dissolution, it sustains—these are the customary focus of

Powys's descriptions, and they are so because they are both the visible and inferential signs of the Mother's presence. Behind his every descriptive passage there is always the sense of mystery and awe, the overwhelming sense of the archetypal *numina* of vegetation, rocks, elements, and seasonal change.

It is possible to see, then, how Powys's particularly intense form of primitivism, his elementalism, directly generates many of the distinctive and steady features of his novels: the natural animism (which, interestingly, is found embryonically in Hardy as pathetic fallacy), the patterns of primal imagery and the symbolic frameworks that define mood, the subtle atmospheres that capture what Powys calls certain "psycho-sensuous feelings that come to us from earth, sky, sea and air", and the cosmic scale that confers on the Powys novel its characteristic feeling of immensity and that allows, correlatively, its constant modulation from the mythic to the commonplace, from the cosmic to the microscopic.

Powys's major novels, which might justifiably be called novels of nature, represent a distinct and significant achievement. Their concerns are as wide as they are profound. Shaped in large part by an elemental creed, and working as much through exempla as through doctrine, they attempt to find or portray an actual, valid, and pre-eminently practical interpretation of the universe. Nature, I would argue, is a primary source of the supreme power of these novels, as it is also of those of Hardy. Indeed, in his *Dostoiévsky* Powys wrote that Nature is, "after all, the Supreme Novelist . . . the greatest of all novelists," to which he added, with characteristic humility, that those who write of her are merely the "sensitive plate for the 'over-novel' of Nature herself".⁸

Notes

¹*A Philosophy of Solitude* (1933), Village Press, 1974, pp. 165, 167.

²For other connections between the two writers see David A. Cook's useful essay "Powys, Hardy, and Wessex", *The Powys Newsletter*, 5, 1977-78, pp. 19-23.

³*Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, Macdonald, 1958, p. 338.

⁴*The Pleasures of Literature*, Cassell, 1938, p. 612 (cited in the text as PL.).

⁵*The Art of Growing Old* (1944), Village Press, 1974, p. 213.

⁶*Autobiography* (1934), Macdonald, 1967, p. 626.

⁷It seems to me there are times when Hardy appears to contradict his conscious agnosticism. In some of the depictions of Egdon and of the Vale in *Tess*, a sort of proto-mysticism emerges, though the foundation of objective detail militates against outright mysticism. The distinction, of course, is that Powys pursues such dimensions in nature deliberately and methodically.

⁸*Dostoevsky* (1974), Village Press, 1974, pp. 102-4.



Two Johnson houses in Norwich Cathedral Close (numbers 19 and 9). It was here on a visit to his mother's sisters, including his "adored" Aunt Dora, at number 9, in 1905 that John Cowper Powys composed the bulk of his poem, *Lucifer* (1956, Village Press 1974: see his Preface, pp. 9-10).

Mary Barham Johnson

The Powys Mother

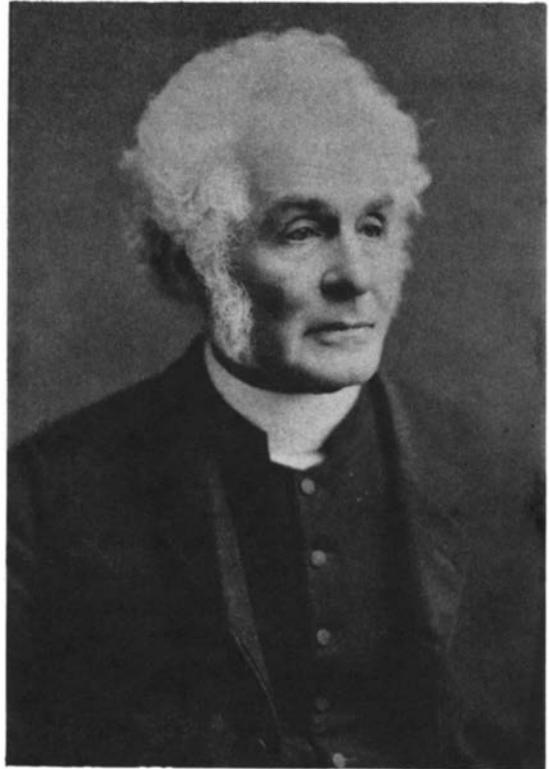
I have never forgiven John Cowper Powys for making no mention of his Mother in his *Autobiography*. Admittedly, children in those days were more aware of their nurse in the nursery, than of their parents; but when John looked back over his early life, he must have realised how much he owed to his mother, especially from her wide reading and love of poetry. When I challenged him, he replied that she was too sacred to be made public in a book.

Mary Cowper Johnson was the fourth daughter of the Rev. William Cowper Johnson, Rector of Yaxham in Norfolk. I never knew her, but I knew the rest of the family very well.

Catharine—always known as Kate—having been given by her god-father some schooling in Brussels, became the governess of her younger sisters, but otherwise seems to have been something of a wanderer, until when over 40, she became the second wife of her cousin Mowbray Donne, whom she had known and loved since childhood. Thereafter her home in London became a port of call for all her nephews and nieces and their children. She was a lively and loveable person. Her husband called her “Saint Catharine”.

William Cowper the only son—always called Cowper—was a very dear uncle to me, for he married my father’s sister Emily Barham Johnson, and succeeded his father as Rector of Yaxham. They had six sons.

Theodora, known as Dora, was a strong, forceful personality. When I was about to go to Oxford, she told me how she wished she could have had my opportunities. I think she was slightly jealous of Kate’s superior education. I used to think what a good headmistress she would have made, or even an M.P. It was she who persuaded Mr



William Cowper Johnson (1813-1893)

Powys to send Marian to Norwich High School. She lived with her Aunts in the Cathedral Close, but after little more than a year was recalled to teach her younger sisters. Dora was John’s favourite Aunt. Writing to my mother in 1947, he claimed that all his life his affection belonged to Aunt Dora.

I doubt if *any* Aunt has *ever* had a greater or more lasting affection from her nephews and nieces as Aunt Dora had . . . I fancy the truth is that between our *rather earthy egoisms* and Aunt Dora’s *rather earthy egoism* there was a natural link and reciprocity combined with a certain *simplicity* and *childish enjoyment and zest for life* that we and Aunt Dora shared.

The next sister, Gertrude, died of T.B. when she was twelve. This left Mary rather isolated, as she was five years younger than Dora, and five years older than Annie. When she was grown-up, Annie and Etta were still "the children". Annie married the Rev. Cecil Blyth, who had been one of her father's pupils. She remained in Norfolk, and her children joined the number of Aunt Dora's much-loved nephews and nieces. Etta was somewhat overshadowed by Dora, but after Dora's death blossomed out as a most loveable person.

In 1868, when Cowper had just come down from Cambridge, he went with a pupil for a year's tour of India, China and Russia. Each week he received a packet of letters from his home. His parents never ceased to exhort him to prayer and Bible reading, and the building of a good Christian character, but some of his father's letters are also delightfully amusing. Dora, and occasionally Kate, sent news of their activities, but the best letters are from Mary. Her first letter gives an amusing account of a meeting of the British Association at Norwich, and a fête at the stately home of a Parliamentary candidate, who used the occasion to collect votes by putting on a free show—a giant and dwarf, food and drinks, and fireworks—and riding up and down the grounds viewing his guests. Mary went to some of the lectures.

There was something very amusing in seeing the young ladies and old, old ladies rushing frantically, with little green tickets in hand, into the lecture room, staying there two minutes listening to deep or rather high subjects about the moon, stars, and all the constellations; then the poor ladies whisper together, "rather too high for me", they say, whereupon they make a bolt through the crowds, rush into another hall, and find themselves in the depths of the earth listening to the most recent discoveries of Mammoth teeth or 'Saurian' skeletons! Norwich indeed looked beside itself in its great thirst for wisdom.

Her next letter states that "the Norwich 'wisdom week' is over." She describes a lecture from "a lady (or woman)", who was advocating that women should have the

same education as men. "Poor needles and pins and such like things should be thrown to the bottom of the sea." Her cousin Etta was "quite wild with disgust".

She sums up her impressions thus:

The lectures were interesting, but from the rapid way one rushed from one to the other . . . I think one came home feeling confused and ignorant. But it was something to *see* these men who are so mighty. With the exception of one or two, there looked to be a great absence of brightness and cheerfulness in their faces . . . One could not help thinking about Solomon's opinion of one kind of knowledge without the other and greater. If you come across the Georgian women, Beware and take care. The great Mr Palgrave says they are of all women the most beautiful!

Mary was at this time 19, and Cowper 24. Cowper's letters were greeted with delight, and were read aloud to the whole family.

We have all been brushing up our Geography this morning, peering for the places you are going to. Annie, after our quiet reading this morning, burst out with "I envy Cowper so, I can hardly sit on my chair!" Mother thinks daily and hourly about you. It is amusing to see her look for the places you are at or going to in the map. It is with half disgust at their existing at all, and yet half affection and love because you are there.

Cowper had been cultivating ferns in a little conservatory, and had left them to Mary's care. She took this charge very seriously, and was distressed at being unable to keep them in such good condition as he had done.

I get so disheartened in the fernery. The rank growing ones do very well—it is the little tender ones that seem to be crying for you, and blaming me because the horrid invisible Sows and Slugs will get to them and eat them. The more I see after flowers and ferns, the more I love them . . . You dear Cowper, you don't know how I long to grumble and talk with you, but it seems a shame to send such small grumblings to India; only the end of it is that we miss you more and more.

Cowper sent some ferns from India, but on arrival most of them seemed to be dead.

Mary was much laughed at by her sisters and cousins for cherishing pots of brown sticks, but she was determined not to give up hope. "I think you must not expect them to grow, but I do earnestly hope they will. I love them like children."

Mary was susceptible to colds and coughs, and the family were concerned lest she should be a victim to the dreaded T.B. Her cousin Alice Barham Johnson at Welborne was dying of it, which made Mary's parents relive the anguish they had suffered at the death of their Gertrude five years ago. Her father would also remember his distress at the death of his sister Catharine in that very house, and of his sister Mary a year later. He was also concerned for his own health. He therefore went to visit his brother Harry Vaughan Johnson in London, and consulted a Doctor there. It was then arranged that Mary should go to say there, and be under this Doctor. Her Uncle Harry offered to pay for her to have painting lessons, and her Aunt Cecie took her to lectures. Aunt Cecie wrote of this to Cowper.

We are diligently trying to improve our minds at the Royal Institution. It is such a pleasure to take Mary, because she enters into it all so heartily, and enjoys the lectures immensely.

Kate was also staying in London with the Donnes—W. B. Donne and his daughters Blanche and Valentia. Their brother Mowbray had recently married Edith Salmon, and was living nearby. Kate's idea of a holiday in London was not so serious.

Mary is attending lectures at the Royal Institution, and going to have painting lessons. I feel 'I am only going for the amusements, and she for instruction. I enjoy my amusements greatly.

Hamilton Barham Johnson was also in London, training as an engineer. He wrote to Cowper, telling him what fun he was having with his cousins.

I have been going every Monday night to the Monday popular Concerts, generally with Valentia and some of her friends. You hear lovely music, all for one shilling. Just now Piatti, Joachim, Rees, Blagrove are the swells.

To-night Hallé is to be there for the first time this season. Valentia, Kate, Mary, Mowbray & Edith and myself are going to join forces there, and I am going to take Arthur Reeve and his fellow pupil, so we shall be a very jolly party.

After Mary's return home, Aunt Cecie wrote,

You can fancy what a pleasure it is to me to hear good accounts of dear Mary. She was such a dear sweet companion, so clever and good and affectionate. But I had to scold her well before I left her at Yaxham, as she was inclined to rebel against the botheration of being made to think about *herself*, and take care of herself. I believe she submits now to rubbings and feedings and resting and drinking, and whatever her Mother and Katie wish. You will be charmed with her painting. It is really wonderfully clever.

Her father wrote about her painting and drawing.

Mary seems very pleased with her drawing lessons, but as usual is full of modest fears lest she should disappoint—the man in the moon (if he brings his lantern too near to look at them).

Miss Mackenzie, the Welbourne governess, wrote,

Mary is quite delightful. We all compare her to a mountain spring—it is so refreshing to fall in with her. Her conversation flows on so prettily with quaint little sparkles of fun every now and again.

Just opposite the gate to Yaxham Rectory is a house which had been built for the Johnson grandmother, but was now occupied by Mrs Millett, who was Mrs Cowper Johnson's cousin, and Mrs Barham Johnson's sister. She had three daughters, Georgie, Nellie and Etta, who became great friends with the Rectory family. They took up archery, played croquet, battledore and shuttlecock or cup and ball, danced, played the piano and sang, read and discussed the same books, collected and painted wild flowers, went to the Norwich Musical Festival, and holiday'd together at Lowestoft and

Cromer. The Johnson girls made frequent visits to their grandmother and Aunt Bessie Patteson at Cringleford, and to the Henry Patteson cousins at Thorpe. When their cousin Harry Patteson came to Yaxham, there were hilarious charades, especially if Hamilton Barham Johnson was also there. But except for their father's pupils, who were usually boys of 15 or 16, there seems to have been a great lack of young men in the neighbourhood.

One of these pupils had been Charles Powys, a grandson of Mr Littleton Powys who had been Rector of Titchmarsh and a near neighbour of Mary's grandfather, John Johnson, when he was Curate of Burton Latimer near Kettering. When William Cowper Johnson was at school at Sherborne he had got to know this Mr Powys's son, who was Rector of Stalbridge. Before going to Cambridge, William had been with a tutor at Thrapston, and had ridden over to see old Mr Powys whom he had known when he was a small boy. His College friend, John Patteson, had his first Curacy at Stalbridge, and William had married John's sister Marianne Patteson. So it is not surprising that young Charlie Powys had come to him as a pupil.

William had been a Wrangler, and was well qualified to coach young men in Maths and Theology. His cousin W. B. Donne described him as having good brains and being clever with his pencil or a gun. "He is a good burly fellow, well-visaged, though something like a negro in his contour."

Marianne was well fitted to be a parson's wife. She played the organ, trained a choir, taught the village girls to sew, and supported her husband in all his undertakings. She was an affectionate mother to seven children, but was somewhat stolid and unimaginative, perhaps due to a Dutch strain in her inheritance.

Her daughter Kate gives us a peep at her in one of her letters. She wrote from London where she was staying with the Donnes.

I must tell you one of Mother's parting injunctions to me. In a touching voice, 'Dear, don't let Valentinia take you often to that church of St Margaret's, Welbeck St.' Of

course I said 'Very well', rather delighting in the charming confusion of names.

For the church was the very 'high' All Saints', Margaret St! She continued,

I suppose I am thought able to take care of myself now, [she was 27] but Mother is in a fright lest I should go to a Pantomime, and begged me not. I can tell you I never had such a desire to go to a Play as I have now, but I suppose I ought not. The Mother would think I was quite contaminated.

Perhaps it was in revolt against her mother's possessiveness that Mary never put restraints on any of her eleven children. Except for inculcating loyalty to their father, she allowed them complete freedom, and even stimulated their individualities.

But her son Littleton says that it was from her mother that she inherited the importance she attached to love; and John stated that he had a real affection for her.

The father was sometimes irked by his wife's somewhat domineering ways, and had bouts of nervousness. In one of her letters to Cowper she says,

Your Father is rather ailing again this Autumn, his throat is not very comfortable. I feel sure it is the damp weather, but he gets *nervous* about it, and fears he shall lose his voice. I do try to cheer him, but you know how difficult it is to do so when he gets down about himself.

My mother was fond of him, and was a frequent visitor when a young woman.

He took me for long walks into the country, and was a most enchanting companion. From him and his family I learnt to know and love wild flowers. When we came in from our walks I felt he had thrown off a load. Sometimes the urge for a jaunt came upon him, and then he would drive me for day trips into the country. Sometimes he went off alone for a week. On other occasions he sat moody and silent, and laughter ceased when he entered the drawing-room, and no-one disturbed him, unless it was his daughter Annie, who sometimes said something that tickled him, and then a most brilliant smile came over his face, and he was himself again.

William Cowper Johnson and John Barham

Johnson were very lucky financially in their marriages, for Marianne Patteson's father, and Anna Morse's father were partners in a flourishing brewery, and their wives, who were sisters, were daughters of a Rotterdam diamond merchant. Mr Morse was very generous in helping to build Welborne Rectory. The young Johnsons must have had considerable charm to have been able to win consent from these rich men for their daughters to marry 'poor Parsons'. For when their father died he had been heavily in debt, and their mother had had a struggle to pay for their education.

John Johnson had always been extravagant, and had overspent on building Yaxham Rectory with six rooms for pupils, besides accommodation for his family of five. His wife, Maria Livius, was a granddaughter of Joseph Foster Barham, who owned plantations in Jamaica. He had a large house in Bedford which he left to his daughter when she married George Livius, who had retired from the East India Company, owing to his disapproval of the behaviour of Warren Hastings. The family were Moravians by religion. When Hayley's *Life of Cowper* was published, they read it with great interest, for Mr Barham had met and admired Cowper. So when Cowper's 'Johnny of Norfolk' was introduced as a suitor for the eldest Miss Livius, he was readily accepted, though he was 38 and she only 17. As there was no parsonage at either of his parishes, he had to find a curacy with a house, which he did at Sarrat near Watford, moving later to Burton Latimer. Not till 1821 was he able to afford to build a Rectory at Yaxham.

As a young man he had sought out his mother's cousin William Cowper, who had just become famous by the publication of "The Task" and "John Gilpin". Cowper wrote a sonnet to him beginning, "Kinsman beloved and as a son by me" and ending with an injunction to follow the example of "our forefather Donne". In spite of much research, the actual relationship to the poet-Dean has never been traced. The strongest proof is heraldic, for on the tomb of William

Donne of Letheringset, who died in 1684, is carved a wolf salient, which is the same coat of arms as that on John Donne's first book of poems. This William could have known the poet John Donne, Dean of St Paul's. William Donne's grandson, who was Cowper's uncle, used the same coat of arms. It is likely that Cowper was told of the relationship when he visited his uncle in Norfolk when he was a boy.

'Johnny' was so proud of his relationship to Cowper that he engaged Lemuel Abbott to come and paint a portrait of him. He devised a double frame for it, which opened like a cupboard door to reveal a pedigree drawn up on parchment by the College of Arms, tracing the Donnes through a number of females to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, son of John of Gaunt.

For the last five years of his life Cowper was cared for in Norfolk by John Johnson. 'Johnny' named his eldest son William Cowper after him. The second son was named after his mother's grandfather Barham, and the third son after her grandmother Dorothy Vaughan.

The great picture of Cowper dominated the dining-room at Yaxham for three generations. When young Charlie Powys came as a pupil, he would have been interested in the pedigree, and the probable connection with the Welsh family.

In 1869 Charlie, now a curate in Dorset, went to Cambridge to take his M.A. and took the opportunity to spend a week at Yaxham. Dora wrote to her brother,

You will be amused to hear that Mr Powys is coming to-morrow. I am sure he will be frightened at the quantity of ladies he will find here.

However, he had lost his shyness, and the mother reported to Cowper,

We all liked him. He seemed pleased to be with us, and quite to enjoy the family party after being so much alone in lodgings.

He played battledore and shuttlecock with the girls, and twelve year-old Etta wrote,



Mary Cowper Powys with (l. to r.) Llewelyn, Marian and Philippa, c. 1886.



Charles Francis Powys and Mary Cowper Powys with their daughter-in-law Dorothy (wife of A. R. Powys) and grand-daughter, Isobel, 1910.

“He kept making furious dashes at it in such a peculiar way.” He preached a “simple, earnest Gospel sermon” on Whit Sunday morning, which gave the parents great pleasure. His manner was solemn and devout and reminded Marianne of her brother John. Charles told her that the Stalbridge people had said the same, when he preached there.

He preached a “simple, earnest Gospel sermon” on Whit Sunday morning, which gave the parents great pleasure. His manner was solemn and devout and reminded Marianne of her brother John. Charles told her that the Stalbridge people had said the same, when he preached there.

Though Mary wrote to her brother on the same day, she did not mention him.

Two years later she and Charles Powys were married. One wonders whether she had any say in the matter. With five unmarried daughters, and a great lack of eligible men in the neighbourhood, the parents probably welcomed his offer, and Mary herself, seeing her sisters Dora and Kate still unmarried at the ages of 25 and 30, may have thought herself lucky. She would I think have been determined to make a success of whatever her fate should be. But when she faced the birth of her first child, she was full of foreboding and did not expect to survive. This fear never left her, and she dreaded each birth, though when the babies arrived she loved them all dearly. Though she had no time to keep up her painting, she never lost her love of reading. Books arrived regularly from Mudie’s Library. She read aloud to her husband and children, and kept an evening hour for her own reading. Her children must have been led to appreciate literature when she read to each separately, or listened to them reading to her.

Her all-embracing love held the large family together in life-long bonds, though she recognised and encouraged the individuality of each one. The sense of security in which they grew up, with their steadfast, honest, reliable father, and their loving, sensitive, idealistic mother, made them an

unusually close-knit family, but at the same time self-centred and slow to mature, so that most of them found the problems of adult life difficult. But their zest for life's experiences forced them to expression in creative forms. Mary did not live to enjoy the fruits of their labours.

In 1913, the year before her death, she and her husband came to Norwich to visit her sisters, Kate, Dora and Etta. Here she was visited by her sister Annie and her husband, and by her brother Cowper and his

wife Emily Barham Johnson. This was I think the first time they had all been together since Mary's marriage. A photograph was taken to celebrate the event. Though she was only 64, she looks older than her elder sisters, and was probably aware that she had not long to live. She died in 1914 and her brother Cowper in 1916. Annie survived the War, though her naval son Reggie was lost at sea. She died in 1921 leaving a daughter and two sons. Kate and Dora both died in 1924, and Etta in 1934.



Norwich, 1913: C. F. Powys, Annie Blyth, Reggie Blyth, Cecil Blyth, Etta Johnson, Emily and Cowper Johnson, Mary Cowper Powys, Dora Johnson, Kate (Mrs M. Donne).

John E. Roberts

Two Photographs of John Cowper Powys

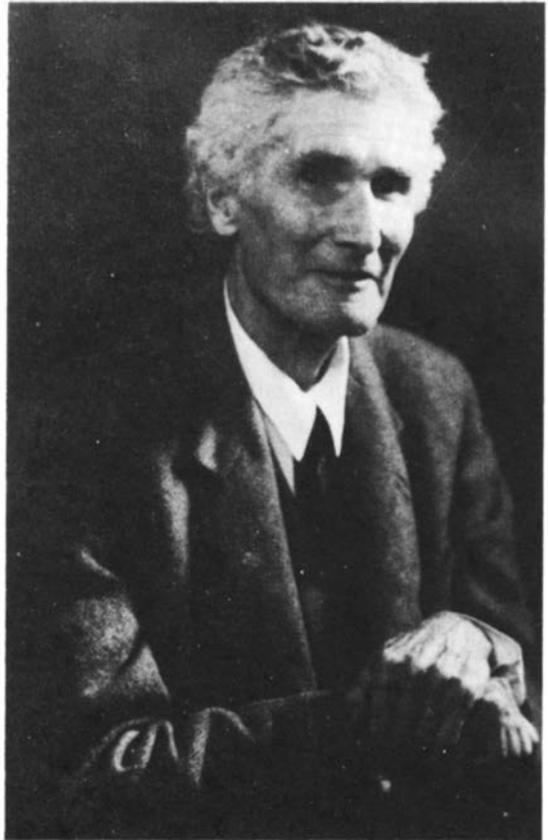
In 1950, when John Cowper Powys had been living in Corwen, North Wales, for fifteen years, I was looking in the window of the Llangollen photographer, Mr. J. Percy Clarke, now deceased, when I saw those photographs he had taken of George Bernard Shaw in the riverside gardens of the Hand Hotel and the one reproduced here of J.C.P. When, in August 1950, I sent the photograph to J.C.P. he made an interesting comment on photographic portraits.

I do thank you for letting me know you bought and liked too that photo of me taken by Mr. Clarke in Llangollen. I like it fairly well myself but I really think and I daresay Mr. Roberts that you'll agree with me that the only entirely satisfactory photos are caricatures and rarely O so rarely, a good—a specially good—snapshot!

My interest in John Cowper Powys really began when he moved to Corwen after his travels abroad and more so when his *Owen Glendower* was first published in England in 1941 and when his *Essays 1935-47* under the title of *Obstinate Cymric* were published by The Druid Press.

"I am fortunate here in Corwen to live in the very heart of the Owen Glendower country . . . Glendower wanted to base his rule on the masses of the people, he wanted to give Wales universities of her own . . ." wrote Powys in *Obstinate Cymric*.

The atmosphere of the days of Glyn Dŵr was all there at Corwen—and all around—Sycharth, the Pillar of Eliseg within a stone's throw of Valle Crucis Abbey so close to Castell Dinas Brân, whose ruins now tower up, jagged and desolate above the romantic town of Llangollen in the Vale of the Cross and the River Dee. It had hardly



John Cowper Powys

changed: as Powys says in *Owen Glendower* (Ch. XI) even the "Banquet Hall of Dinas Brân had fallen, by the year of grace fourteen hundred, into so ruinous a state that it was very seldom used."

Of my visit to 7 Cae Coed, Corwen, Powys writes,

I think of you coming up that "little path of stones" [which is how I had written] past the little iron gates into the back yard of Numbers 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 of Cae Coed—yes, I go thro', almost daily, that wood; and (over a barbed-wire

fence and a wall) clear up the first ridge of our portion of the Berwyn Range where on the top there stands that queer deserted little house visible for miles over the valley called locally Liberty Hall and built by some magnate of the great house of Cecil who hired it from Rûg where our local squire lives and which clearly comes from "Grûg" a Mound for (as I expect you know) it was there that Gruffudd ap Cynan the father of Owen Gwynedd and the grandfather of a discoverer of America was for 10 years a captive not in Rûg but in Chester of the Normans. But I am doing worse than carrying coals to Newcastle I am dropping a load of them on the head of one I shrewdly opine who could teach me more than I know of these environs.

My wife Barbara (who died in 1978) and I visited John Cowper Powys in the summer of 1958 at 1 Waterloo, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd. It was in January 1955 that he had written to me saying "If I get into that little cottage, mostly a staircase—before the middle of February—if then—but I will let

you know when I am happily settled there.'" He was somewhat impatient of the delay by the builder.

When we arrived we found the cottage* at the foot of a mountain of slate. The door was opened by a giant of a man (both physically and mentally) yet how princely he seemed. His greeting was memorable, as he beckoned us to follow him upstairs where he rested and worked.

After a warm and friendly welcome he eventually rested on a couch, as seen in the photograph. On the left of where we sat we noticed well-stocked bookshelves, and on his table the bottle of milk, for his diet in later years was mostly milk and eggs. On our right was a typical low Welsh cottage window to which he turned his gaze every so

*I refer only briefly to the sanctuary of that cottage interior because it has been so well described by Angus Wilson, Glen Cavaliero, Jacquetta Hawkes and others in Belinda Humfrey's *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*, 1980.



John Cowper Powys

often. We were reminded of Rodin's "Thinker" for as he looked down one seemed to sense his imaginings taking shape, before he gave us his considered judgments.

I well remember the sound of running water as if it were raining outside, but unlike present day traffic on our main roads, it was a soothing sound. He explained that it was the cascading of water down the mountain of slate which ran as a stream at the back of his cottage and my mind went back to the poem—*Nant y Mynydd groyw loyw*, *The Mountain Stream*, by the Welsh poet, John Ceiriog Hughes (1832-1887) who lived at Llanarmon-Duffryn-Ceiriog near my hometown, Llangollen.

That day Powys told us much of courage . . . One wondered what he must have been like in his heyday when for many years he toured America (1905 to 1934) lecturing.

He spoke to us of many topics—from the mystery of life to that of death. One seemed privileged to listen. I well remember how he discoursed on the theme of the paradox of St. Paul on which he has also expounded in *The Pleasures of Literature* to the effect that St. Paul was the *psychologist* of the Revelation and that the two writers to whom the New Testament owes what is most precious and memorable in its pages were St. Luke and St. Paul.

Gamel Woolsey to Alyse Gregory, Some Letters 1930-1957

edited by Kenneth Hopkins

Gamel Woolsey's letters to Alyse Gregory, which I have been able to copy by the kindness of Miss Rosemary Manning, cover roughly the period 1930-1960, with considerable gaps here and there, occasioned probably by some letters getting lost; and for the later years very few letters seem to have survived, although one may suppose that the correspondence continued until Gamel's death in 1964. Gamel never dated her letters, and frequently omitted the address from which she wrote. Accordingly, they can only be dated from postmarks (in the few cases where envelopes have been preserved), from dates inserted on some by Alyse Gregory on receipt, and from internal evidence where an event (like the publication of a book) is mentioned—and then only approximately in most cases. This is teasing for an editor, but not of great consequence to the reader, whose main interest, quite properly, is in what Gamel has to say.

Gamel's punctuation is eccentric, as John Cowper Powys's was. She makes much use of the dash for a full stop, and often goes on with a lower-case letter; sometimes she has a capital letter after a comma. She uses “—”, or “—” in the same quotation. Sometimes she underlines a book title, sometimes she puts it between quotation marks, sometimes she does neither. I have preferred to keep her punctuation, although I have corrected her occasional spelling mistakes. K.H.

[? August 1930]

My dearest Alyse,

I hope this will reach you before you sail. I am not sure.

I must answer what I have always answered. I will not go away with Lulu. I will not leave Gerald. I love Lulu. But I also love Gerald. In the seven months we have lived together I have come to really love him and really be attached to him. It is not that I love him more. It is that it is different. Gerald is very dependent on me as Lulu is on you. All his grown up life he has been

lonely. After dusk he can not bear me out of his sight. If I go out on the balcony and am out of the room for five minutes Gerald will follow me. It is not love though he loves me very much, but a feeling of necessity. It would be very cruel to leave him even if I wanted to do so. And I do not. We are happy together. I truly think that the best chance of our all being happy is in the way I have chosen.

I truly think when we have met we will all feel better. Our present separation puts us all under a special strain. Gerald will not be unhappy as long as he knows I really love him. And I do. Lulu when he is no longer separated from me will feel very differently I think.

Your nobility and generosity always profoundly move me. I know your love for Lulu is without limits. But, Alyse, it is impossible for you to make me believe that it would be for Lulu's good or happiness to leave you, and to go away with me. I know it is not true. My profoundest instincts tell me so.

And I do believe we can be happy in this way.

Two things in your letter I did not understand. My blaming Lulu [for] going away. I have never blamed him for going away as he did. I think it made everything harder, but with his temperament it was necessary.

And the reference to Gertrude. She never tried to influence me. She was most scrupulous not to. She wanted all our happiness of course, but she did not try to move me in any direction.

I must stop. It is so late and I am so stupid. I must stop. Dearest Alyse, I love you.

Gamel

In August 1930 A.G. and Ll.P. sailed for New York and were in America (including the voyage to the West Indies) until 31 March 1931.

[? 1930]

My dearest Alyse,

I think of you so much today and with such appreciative charming memories of you that I must write to you.

I do hope you are well, and happier. I do so want you to be.

I wish I could have been at Rex Hunter's when you went there to tea. I expect my ghost, a thin tired, rather dusty, ghost still haunts those rooms. And stirred the dust slightly as it watched you from some corner peering out from behind a pile of books. How long ago and how far away!

I sit opposite Gerald beside a fire in a dark afternoon in Norfolk, and all the time I see you in a blue dress in the upper room at the White Nose. And it is summer, then it changes and the rain is lashing the window, and it is winter. Or we are going flint hunting, or you have just come to tea at Ringstead. For we did have many happy hours, didn't we?

We are going to Yorkshire I think in a few days and perhaps as far as Westmoreland to see Wordsworth's cottage and that country. But only for a week probably and then returning here, until December. Gerald wants to take me to see his family, in a half-engaged capacity. It will be rather awful, I expect. You know his father is a retired army officer with a terrible temper. Fortunately his mother's mother came from Louisiana and my being a Southerner will please her. But they can't approve of my not even being divorced as yet. They haven't heard of me yet.

If I could only see you there would be so much I would tell you. Dear, dear Alyse, I do love you. I do wish you so very well.

Gamel

You must not think of me as unhappy. If you and Lulu are happy, I am happy too. I am very fond of Gerald. And he is very devoted and very kind. And takes almost as good care of me as you do of Lulu. If that is possible!

This letter is signed "Elsa" which is crossed out and "Gamel" substituted. It seems to have been sent to New York by the reference to Gamel's husband Rex Hunter, and may thus be dated later than the previous letter. For a note on Rex Hunter see p. 73 below.

Half Moon Cottage,
Aldbourne,
Marlborough,
Wilts.
[1938-9]

Dearest Alyse,

I disagree with both opinions about Byron & Lady Byron, for I don't believe that anyone was ever in love with *anyone* they had lived with for more than a year or two. Being in love is a strange state—of dream, of illusion, which no one could possibly retain while living with its object over many years. Human relations are not like that. People become much more profoundly attached more tender & devoted sometimes, but they do not stay in love. It isn't possible or so rarely so as to be unknown & unheard of. I think it is remarkable that we can stay even deeply attached to people we live with, for human beings are disillusioning at close quarters. Or perhaps that is the wrong way of putting it. Perhaps I should say that human beings are not adapted to living happily & graciously together. Close relations put a strain upon our illusions that they will not bear—But at the same time they sometimes forge a profound feeling of love, pity, common humanity which can become the strongest thing in life.

"Without feet on the fender
Love is but slender"

is certainly a wise proverb.

We have always known that Lulu's most profound, most tender and most permanent feelings were for you. But do not let us let these things trouble us any more.

I have seen two pages of Lulu's novel he sent me—something about Dittany—the flower & a girl. You know what Lulu is—tomorrow it will be a white owl and the month of May. Lulu is in love with life and the visible world—those are his real paramours—

Life has long seemed *to me* a very sad affair—An adventure in which stoicism will prove our most valuable quality—However there are days & hours—Lets walk to Davos by ourselves again, and talk the hours by.

We leave next week & go to Aldbourne.

With my love always
Your
Gamel

This letter is addressed from Aldbourne, but the last sentence probably means Gamel expected to be there before Alyse would have time to answer.

The reference to "Lulu's novel" concerns, of course, *Love and Death*.

Bell Court,
Aldbournne,
Marlborough.

[Early December 1939]

[Summer 1938]

Dearest Alyse,

I am just writing a line—at last for I have been so harrassed with six people in the house to cook for and talk to.

I was sad about your letter—& I wanted to write before. But I don't think things are so simple as that really. I don't think there is only one true love. People are loved in different ways. And a passionate heart has love for more than one—perhaps for many. I think Genji was very wise as well as very charming about that. Do you remember Murasaki says he had the capacity of never forgetting his old loves and of returning to them at intervals all his life with a return of the freshness of his early feelings.

Lulu's book was a trouble to me too, for I did not want him to write anything about his association with me however indirect. Though I realize that only certain feelings of one's own & certain facts (which do not matter) are made use of in any work of art which is to some extent a *Roman a clef*. It is sure to be transformed and only indirectly inspired by any real feelings or real events—But there—I should not wish to prevent the creation of any work of art, especially one by Lulu. He says that you wrote a *perfect* introduction to his book, He has twice spoken of it—how wonderfully good it is.

When will your book be out?—that I can look forward to seeing with entire pleasure. I hope to come at the end of September or in early October—and I long to see you, dear Alyse. I send always my very great love

Gamel

Alyse Gregory's book of essays, *Wheels on Gravel* was published in 1938; and is dedicated to Gamel Woolsey.

Dearest Alyse,

What can I say to you when Lulu is lying dead—it seems to take the light out of the skies—but it is so infinitely worse for you that I can hardly think of it or imagine it. And this desperate last illness on top of everything that had gone before—Oh I don't know how you endured it.

Dear Alyse I know it is too early to think of such things, but Gerald & I would be very happy if you would live in our little cottage. It has three little rooms & you could live as independently as you liked. And we would be so happy to have you near us.

You and Lulu were my home in this world—wherever you were. Don't let us ever lose each other—let us always be together whenever we can. I love you always with my deepest love—and your personality always moves & delights me—

If it would be any help or any comfort to you for me to come to Clavadel—I beg you to telegraph me & I will try. I do not know if it would be possible. These things are difficult now I know—But I would try very hard—Oh I wish I could hear how you are—something about you. You mean so much to me. Dear dear Alyse I always loved you so much and always shall—your devoted

Gamel
Gamel Woolsey

Oh the letter I wrote you from Wales has just been returned to me—this war seems so to divide us—

Llewelyn Powys died at Clavadel on December 2, 1939.

Bell Court,
Aldbourne,
Malborough,
Wilts.

[Aldbourne. 1941-42]

[December 1939]

Dearest Alyse,

Your letter has just come. It is a lovely letter, worthy of you and I can say no more to praise it.

You were so much a part of Lulu's life and Lulu of yours that I hope in a way you will always keep him with you. I am so glad you were with him in life and in death always—for your love was the stay of his life—as necessary to him as sun and warmth. He lived in it and was happy in it.

Poor Lisaley I do feel sad to think of her. So single hearted & left alone again after her few happy months.

Gerald & I have set our hearts on your coming to us, to our *little* cottage. I hope you will like this idea. Unfortunately we have six people in the house now—but they will leave in March, I think. It is a very tiny little cottage, with a little sitting room downstairs & two tiny bedrooms above. It is rough and old, but when it has a good fire in the old grate it is warm & bright. You should be as private as you wish.

And we would truly love to have you so close to us. As Gerald says, "It isn't only that I love Alyse, but that I think her such an absolutely charming companion."

And you know some of the happiest times I've ever spent have been with you. Don't let us ever lose each other. This is such a sad world & 'Time & Chance' happens to all of us. Let us keep what we can out of these wrecks & disasters.

Dear Alyse, I wish I could come to you—I wish you could tell me more—write me what you plan.

I love you deeply & constantly
your devoted,

Gamel

"Lisaley" was Lisaly Gujer, whom Llewelyn had known since his first visit to Davoz Platz, 1909-1910; she shared with Alyse the nursing of Llewelyn in his last illness.

My dearest Alyse,

I think of you & don't write. I don't know why. Today I'll think of you & write too.

Gerald got home only last night from a fortnight's work in London as a special A R P Warden. He found it both interesting & boring. And always says it is all so much less bad than we think—though there are horrid moments when buildings do get hit & people do get killed.

I spent a night there a fortnight ago just before Gerald went up to stay. And I am ashamed to say enjoyed it extremely. I can't help it. There's a kind of excitement in the air when bombs begin to fall & there's a slight danger (but not much), which I can't resist. I think that thing in us which loves a little danger is one of our most unfortunate qualities because it leads ordinary people to half enjoy wars—and keeps them from hating war & feeling the disgust for it they should.

Gerald had said I wouldn't mind London at all after Spain—and I didn't. But there were certainly things that surprised me. One was the way the bombs shrieked like banshees as they went past sometimes. Then we were sitting in a room that opened on a garden & once or twice when a bomb fell fairly close the blast blew the curtains in as if a gale had struck the house. It was startling. Then I'd thought the barrage would be a sort of continuous roar during a raid, as Gerald describes it on the western Front. It was so loud there, he says, that they had to write out orders, no one could hear them.

Instead, there's a pop here, a bang there and a sort of sea-lion roar somewhere else & occasionally a deafening crash as a gun opens up just behind you. It's curious but not impressive. And I noticed that my sister-in-law slept calmly through it & the children never stirred. The animals who were upset at first now pay no attention.

I should add that I got a fair impression of it all, as the night I spent there was described by the papers as 'a night of heavy & continuous raids with bombs on eighty London districts,' and by Blair as one of the noisiest nights they ever had. There was hardly a moment from 7.30 until I went to sleep about 1.30 when you couldn't hear the drone of German bombers & the noise of the barrage.

The calmness of everyone is amazing. There's something really fantastic about the old ladies buying wools and asking the shop assistants if they are sure these vests won't shrink in an

atmosphere of wailing sirens & crashing bombs.

The most startling war experience I've heard of was Arthur Waley's. He was called on as a stretcher bearer when the YMCA in Tottenham Court Road was hit & there were over two two hundred casualties from flying glass. He said that it was like the Ballad of True Thomas where he "waded through red blude abane the knee." He said the blood actually splashed over his shoes as he walked through it. He said he felt no repulsion but a sort of wonder at being there.

The blood struck Gerald too. He said that even when injuries were slight everyone was covered with blood. It trickled through the floors & ran down the stairs. Its the glass.

But what a letter—

I was interested to hear that you were reading Tolstoy & wish we could talk about him. Or rather that you could talk to me. For I'm not sure that I want to read about Tolstoy & his wife. It seems such a painful subject—I have such a passion for Tolstoy as a novelist, but somehow the idea of his life always depresses me. I think *Le Rouge et le Noir* is wonderful — but I don't really care a great deal about *La Chartreuse de Parme*, though it is charming.

It has rained so here. I loved your description of Mrs Lucas. But you seem really to be *in the War*. My love to Gertrude & to Katie, too.

With my great love always,

Gamel

"Blair" was Gamel's brother-in-law, in whose house she was staying.

[Aldbourne.
"2 Sept 1950" A.G.]

My darling Alyse,

It was lovely to have a letter from you. The great confusion is over, but it has left us tired restless, depleted and good for nothing.

Gerald, amazingly, is already working hard again. But not on anything that requires imagination. He is doing the bibliography for his book on Spanish Literature. I just feel tired and let down with no imagination, intelligence, or energy. I did nothing but cook & shop & talk for five weeks. The meals people have to have! Meal after meal—is it really necessary to eat so much & so often?

It is difficult to return to any kind of intellectual life after such an orgy—

The wedding had a certain charm. As I was about to enter the church Beryl de Zoete appeared beside the door as if she lived in it, dressed in a strange cloak & a huge bow. Photographers were snapping photographs & turning films. The service was long, with a full nuptial mass. As we emerged afterwards & the photographers began to snap & turn again, a violent dark grey rain had begun to fall & it was all black umbrellas.

But the reception was quite gay, in a big studio which my brother-in-law's house happens to have. There it was bright in spite of the dark downpour and there was champagne & a wedding cake and the usual wedding festivities. But none of our old friends were there except Arthur Waley and Beryl.

Still I think such weddings are a mistake. The bride and groom get tired and irritable, with all the fuss and bother of the preparations. The bride looks her worst in those cold whites which only suit a few fair virginal-looking girls. They finally get away from it all late and tired and in the worst mood for beginning life together.

We were forced into giving the kind of wedding we didn't like or approve of (& certainly couldn't afford) by Miranda's wanting the kind of wedding her French in-laws would like. As Gerald said it was a fine example of *pot luck* as practised by the Pacific coast Indians when they burn furs and other valuables just to show that they can! It also illustrated the theory of conspicuous waste—But I don't think really that that is the way to regard festivities. For it is always something gained to be gay if only for an hour or two—Only we'd rather have given the money to Miranda to furnish her new flat. And I did feel so sorry for her and Xavier, the wedding over, hanging about waiting for her French passport, tired and dull like children after a party—but of course they will recover and enjoy themselves in France.

I thought of my marriage to Rex Hunter because it was so different. We took the elevated to the City Hall and were married with two loafers as witnesses—And then we walked all the way back to Patchin Place laughing and talking all the way. We were not marrying the right people of course—But we were very gay. There were no guests & no wedding presents to bother us. We only went home & cooked supper. And I still think that unless you can be married in a village among people you have known all your

life that is the only way to be married—if you must marry at all.

What you told me about Rex made me very sad. I had never heard anything about it and did not know he had gone back to New Zealand. ‘Creep home and take your place there’—

He could be such a good companion, so amusing & gay, such fun to be with on a ferry boat—in a snow storm on Fifth Avenue—over a late breakfast in Patchin Place surrounded by Sunday newspapers, with the pigeons the pigeon scarer drove up wheeling outside the windows—Those warm starlit nights and chilly dawns when we were young.

And I have a feeling of regret & guilt for I once promised to take him for better and for worse—

Your dream was so like dreams of mine—“Too late—always too late”—the dreams in which I search for someone I never find—sometimes it is you—sometimes Ned, my mother, my father—‘The day is gone’

All my love

Gamel

Miranda was Gerald Brenan’s natural daughter, born before he had met Gamel Woolsey. She had brought the child up.

The Day is Gone is the title of A.G.’s Autobiography—a quotation from Keats.

Rex Hunter

This seems an appropriate place to say a few words about Rex Hunter, by way of a footnote to his relationship with Gamel Woolsey.

Maurice Reginald Hunter was born at Southbrook, New Zealand, on 5 Jan 1889, the son of Thomas and Bella Hunter. His father is described as a storekeeper, and as Southbrook was a small place he probably kept something like a village general store. Rex Hunter describes his birthplace as Oxford, which was the nearest town; but his birth certificate gives the birthplace as Southbrook.

I have learned nothing of his education, but it seems likely that he was not at a university; a magazine article at the time of his return to New Zealand in 1949 speaks of his early years at Oxford, and there is no university at Oxford, New Zealand. Probably he was in local journalism as a young man, for the next date we have is 1915, when he left home to see the world, as he put it. A year later we find him working on

a newspaper in Honolulu, the *Advertiser*, and shortly after that he was in the United States, where he worked at different times in those early years on newspapers at Salt Lake City, Denver, and Kansas City: he was moving steadily east, we see, and his next stop was Chicago, where he was with the *Daily News* at a time when Ben Hecht, one of the most celebrated journalists of his time, and Carl Sandberg the poet were both employed by the *News*. Sandberg was the Labour Editor, whatever that was. I think it is likely that it was in Chicago that Hunter first met John Cowper Powys, who spent a great deal of time there in the years around 1920, when he was associated with Maurice Browne and the Little Theatre. It was in 1919 that a Chicago publisher put out four one-act plays by Hunter under the title *Stuff o’ Dreams*, and it may be that one or more of these were staged; but until I know more and have seen the book this is one more point not to be pursued at present. It was Hunter’s first book, which suggests that his interest in writing for the theatre was strong at that time, and perhaps that it ceased to be so later, for we hear of no more plays. But Hunter was sometimes engaged as an actor, and went to the theatre at least once in his life, as we shall presently discover.

The years up till around 1922 when he settled in New York are fully covered in Hunter’s autobiography, *Odyssey of an Antipodean*, but that remains unpublished and I have not seen it. We know that he left Chicago for New York perhaps about 1922, and there we may leave him for the moment and turn our attention to Gamel.

Gamel Woolsey also arrived in New York about 1922. She recounts the circumstances in her novel, *One Way of Love* (which also is unpublished) and there describes her first meeting with Rex Hunter, whom she calls Alan; and from the moment he appears in the story it concerns nothing but their relationship—courtship, marriage, separation.

They were married in New York in 1923, and not long afterwards set out for England, which Hunter especially wished to visit as “the old country”. Gamel, as it happened, had been there before, when her mother took her to Europe for several months after her father died; but that was ten years earlier, when Gamel was a little girl. They travelled on a joint passport issued on November 28, 1923—it is a British Passport—in which she appears as Elizabeth Gammell Hunter, née Woolsey, with the original spelling of her name as Gammell (which was her

mother's maiden name.) Gamel's part in this passport is crossed through as if cancelled under a date stamp January 1st, 1925. By then she and Rex were separated, and if she went abroad she would have a passport of her own.

Some part at least of the visit to England was passed very happily, but when the Hunters returned to New York they soon drifted apart and ceased to live together; I notice that I have not mentioned that soon after their marriage Gamel was obliged by her delicate health—it was only a year or two after her serious illness and a year in a sanatorium—to have an abortion; and perhaps this was among the causes of the failure of the marriage. The whole sad story—and it is a sad one—is told in *One Way of Love*. After Gamel went to England around 1930 she and her husband never met again, nor it seems did they correspond; and when Rex Hunter died in 1960 Gamel did not hear of it, nor did she ever hear of it before her own death four years later.

If I summarise the remainder of Hunter's life I shall be relating mainly facts that were never known to Gamel. It is possible that Gamel may have seen one or two of his books, although she does not mention them in her letters to Alyse—and Alyse was her main and almost her only confidant.

Hunter was a good journalist and a successful one; he was a specialist leader writer at different times for two very important newspapers, the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *New York Sun*, and this alone is an indication of his professional standing. He published three books of poems, *And Tomorrow Comes* (1924), *The Saga of Sinclair* (1927) and *Call Out of Darkness* (1946). He published one novel, *Porlock* (1940), which carries a preface by John Cowper Powys. Gamel Woolsey appears in it briefly under the name Elizabeth. This novel gives a lively picture of the society based in and around Patchin Place and Greenwich Village in the early 'twenties and justifies at least some of John Cowper's praise.

Hunter was in England again around 1928 and wrote among others for *John o' London's*. He then went to the Continent and finally returned to New York a year or so later, when it seems he remained until 1949, when he returned to New Zealand. There he worked for the *Timaru Herald*, at Timaru, half way between Christchurch and Dunedin; and in February 1960 he died at Dunedin. His manuscripts and papers were afterwards deposited at the National Library in Wellington, where I intend to inspect them as soon as I can find somebody to pay my fare.

The typescript of Hunter's autobiography finishes at about the time of his marriage, and it was his intention to write a second volume. This is not among his papers and it is not known yet whether or not it was written, or partly written; but if it was, and it can be found, there will certainly be valuable information about his marriage. At the end of the existing typescript there is a synopsis of what is to follow, which includes these sentences:

"My marriage to Elsa Gamel Woolsey, exquisite poetess . . . we see Eugene O'Neill's play "Strange Interlude" as guests of Judge John M. Woolsey . . . Elsa and I visit her native South . . . Life as a guest on a Southern Plantation . . . voyage of Elsa and myself to England . . ."

All this is mouth-watering stuff for those of us who are interested in Gamel.

So far as the existing typescript goes, it too may well contain material of general interest. Hunter knew not only Sandberg, as formerly mentioned, but Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters (a great friend of John Cowper Powys's) and e.e. cummings; and I have no doubt this autobiography will be found to contain passages concerning John Cowper.

Syracuse
[1951]

Dearest Alyse

I wish I had begged you to write to me here, but I did not realize in time that Gerald was having letters sent here. Our plans are always so uncertain.

We have been travelling right round the coast of Sicily, visiting places with Greek remains.

We went a few days ago to an immense ruined Greek city called Selinus. Temples are lying on the ground where an earthquake had thrown them, with a few columns still standing, their tall altars, roads, a huge place of tombs, hidden now under sand & spare dry grasses. And the sea sands are slowly remorselessly drifting over the ruins. We bought some worn copper coins from a fisherman sitting on the shore—They find them on the shore after storms.

The place was beautiful, bare, lonely & sad, and somehow consoling. For Selinus had a sad

history (like most Greek cities). But it is all over now. And the clean sand is covering it up & the fresh sea wind blows over the grey ruins and the generations of sea parsley from which it takes its name. And it is more beautiful now than it ever was before.

We had always read that Syracuse was extremely ugly and only to be visited because of its historical associations, but Gerald & I love it. It's so surrounded by the sea, and the bare limestone plateau where the Greek theatre is, & where some of the Greek cave tombs are actually inhabited (if this were Spain every one of them would be) is austerely beautiful.

There are very strange deep limestone quarries there now turned into gardens & orange groves. They are sad places, I think in spite of their strange, rather fairy tale beauty, for it was in them that the Athenian captives languished out their lives working the quarries & dying of the work and the heat, after the victory of Syracuse over the Athenian expedition. 'Man is a wolf to men.'

But I liked very much to sit in a seat at the Greek theatre & remember that Aeschylus probably saw his own plays performed there, & that Plato certainly sat here often during the period when he was trying to reform Dionysius.

Joan enclosed a letter with the post she sent. She writes such nice letters. She said that you were coming, & I liked to think that you would be there—only I wish I could be too.

She seems to like Hope—I am so glad. She must be company for him. Poffett will never want me to come back. He is a lucky cat.

I must stop. I am writing in such a noisy café that my letter is very wandering, I expect.

My love

Gamel

"Joan" is Joan Lamburn who was Louis Wilkinson's fourth wife; she died in 1953. "Hope" is John Hope-Johnstone, Gerald Brenan's old friend, who was living in the Brenan's house at Aldbourne while Joan was staying there.

Palinuro
Calabria.
["12.4.51" A.G.]

My dearest Alyse,

It seems such a long time since I heard from you. Joan enclosed a note with the letters she sent to Sicily saying you were coming to Aldbourne so I hope you are there now & the sun is shining and you can sit in the garden—But how dreadful the weather has been. And I couldn't say it had been really very warm in Sicily or Italy except in Taormina when the sirocco was blowing.

Here we are staying at a most beautiful village by the sea among olive groves, to rest after our travels. It takes its name from Palinurus, the pilot of Odysseus who was supposed to have been drowned & buried there.

We walk among the olives & take row boats to the caves—I would swim if I had a bathing suit—and did not have a cold.

Yesterday we went in a boat to visit a cave where there are bones of animals and men in the earth & stones. The guide book for some reason says that they are thought to be bones from Octavian's ships. We spoke of that to the fishermen who rowed us there—but he did not like to think of drowned sailors—he said they had been thrown there from the castle above—But other sailors said they were bones of people who were drowned in The Flood.

I had heard of the Antidiluvians before when we visited a Greek temple at Himera. A man told me that it had been built by the men who lived at Himera 'before the Deluge'. I don't wonder that they think so, for the tremendous grey ruins of the Greek temples seem to belong to a world impossibly remote from theirs.

Much of Calabria is very poor—much as Spain was before the Civil War. In many towns we saw the streets full of workless men—it is the great problem of Italy. It is extraordinary how people can travel without noticing the Life of a country. So many people have told us we must be sure to visit Palermo for its wonderful churches with their glittering gold mosaics. But no one ever mentioned that it has the most appalling slums, with two hundred thousand people living in them—half the population of the city. And people don't dwell on those screaming motor horns & roaring motor cycles & motor scooters either. I've never seen such frantic or such noisy traffic. The noise in the bigger Italian cities (except Rome) is almost unbearable. How modern inventions have spoiled the world—the

motor car, the radio (few of those, thank goodness in Italy—you seldom hear one.)

We go on to Naples in a few days, beginning our homeward journey—It would be lovely if you were at Bell Court when we came back—I have not heard from you for so long. I hope I may have a letter in Naples—

With much love

Gamel

[“Aldbourne 30 Sept 1951” A.G.]

My dearest Alyse,

It almost seems vain to write to you now that you have gone:

‘Ten leagues beyond Man’s life—’

Surely the letter will fall in the sea, the words fade from the paper. I can’t really believe in anyone’s returning to America.

But I thought of you often while you were on the wide misty ocean. How strange those great floating Palace Hotels must be. And how little I should like them.

Oh I do hope you are happy in America. That all is well. I hope it will influence you to write. I liked very much your idea of writing on the authors of McGuffey’s Readers. It seemed to me a really good subject, one that would reveal all sorts of things about the past—‘the weather in the streets’.

It would be the kind of book I would like, I know.

Did you manage to read *Porius*? I have been reading ‘*Other Voices, Other Rooms*’ by Truman Capote, a very young Southern writer, & think it so good. I think I told you about meeting him at Taormina. I had read his short stories recently—but I think I talked to you about them. Perhaps you will meet him if he has gone to America.

Please tell me if you hear anything about Robert Lowell. I am very interested in his poetry. But it seems to be developing strangely, becoming more crabbed and more tortuously religious.

Gerald’s *Spanish Literature* came out yesterday, and we await the reviews with some apprehension, as they say that only dons will be able to review it because of the erudition required; and really they are the last people who should review

a book of criticism which is at all original or imaginative..

I was sad to have missed Joan and really do not know why I could not find her. I was saying to Ronnie recently that I believed that the people we should meet went by on the other side of the street, turned the corner just ahead of us, took the other road . . . But I don’t know why I am wandering off into these digressions.

Do you think that Joan would care for this cottage again—as you say you would not—probably not as she has so many cats and her own cottage now. We might be in Spain for seven or eight months if we can manage about money. But I have such a dread of the whole process of selling the house—I mean on account of the servants who will feel it so much—that I dread going to Spain now.*

Dear Alyse, I do hope you are happy, are interested, are well.

With much love

Gamel

William Holmes McGuffey (1800-1873) was a college professor who published six *Eclectic Readers* over the years 1836-1857 which sold a total of more than 122,000,000 copies. The fifth, the *Eclectic Spelling Book*, was written by his brother Alexander Hamilton McGuffey in 1846. I don’t know if A. G. wrote anything on the subject, but there have been at least three books on the McGuffeys.

“Ronnie”—Ronald Duncan.

[“Malaga 29 April 52” A.G.]

My dearest Alyse,

Oh how sad your letter made me. Though I so seldom saw Gertrude I felt that I had lost almost my oldest and kindest friend. And I thought so much of how you would miss having her next door. And Oh, what will Katie do?—I can not imagine her without Gertrude there to look after her—Could she live there alone? And I can not imagine her being anywhere else. But I suppose everything somehow is arranged, whoever dies. Life comes to some terms with what is left. The centre prop of the Powys family is fallen indeed, as you say. She held them together and was the centre to which they came back.

I am so glad that you did get back in time to be with her and to help them all.

But though it is so sad—what a wonderful way to die—only ill for a short time, keeping up till the last, only thinking of others. It made me think of Emily Brontë's death, though she died in such a different spirit. Ah, such a good death.

It is strange that the last few days I had been thinking so much of Gertrude. I found a number of her old letters to me out here and in Lulworth—there are two old chests full of old letters & manuscripts & papers of all sorts—

As you say—We know what life is.

I haven't the heart to write a real letter. This is only to take you my love.

Gamel

My love and sympathy to Katie—I will write—
And to Theodore too—

Gertrude Powys died at Weymouth after a short illness in April 1952.

[March 1957?]

My darling Alyse,

I am so glad you are happier. I believe good hope *does* lie at the bottom—but I couldn't say why—Do you remember Walt Whitman's strange saying: "Death is different from what men think, and luckier." What *did* he mean? But life seems to me as mysterious as death.

I finally did hear from Alex Brooks, from Barcelona—did I tell you? He wrote me such a nice letter—But they wanted a flat or a pension—not a hotel—and asked for names—and this filled me with worry because a flat is of course impossible for a week or even a fortnight; and I simply don't know any pensions that are at all attractive. And Marjorie who might be away. Then I have *no* confidence in myself on these occasions. I feel sure that anything I recommend will turn out badly—Some people think that *they* are real & everything else is a dream. Gerald is one of those. But I feel on the contrary that everything else is all too real but *I* am not—I am something from a dream, & have no power to act on this hard, heavy world. I expend great energy (or so it seems) on trying to push people into place, but nothing happens & in the end I give up—that's really the explanation of my life!

The garden is full of frezias again. How lovely these returns of the flowers & the seasons are. There's a 18th century Mexican poem called *Primavera y sus Noticias* which I think is such a charming title. I wish I had thought of it.

We have exchanged Cyril Connolly for Raymond Mortimer, who has been very sweet tempered, kind, & charming. He is staying with Ralph & Frances Partridge & has just been here. But they are all leaving tomorrow.

No, I've never seen the Wm Wetmore Story—we only read reviews of it. Thank you so much always for the Manchester Guardian. How *good* it is. I'm so glad Florida came—& Sylvia & Valentine too.

So much love

Gamel

The best book on William Wetmore Story is by Henry James, and both Alyse and Gamel would have known this book, from their keen interest in James. His book was published in 1903 and Gamel can hardly have read reviews of it; the book mentioned must have been a new work, but I have not yet traced it.

Final sentence: Florida Scott-Maxwell, an American friend of Alyse; and Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland.

[“p.m. 10 Sept 57” A.G.]

My darling Alyse,

It seems a long time since I have heard from you, but perhaps it is not. It seems long to me because I want to hear.

It is a wonderful moonlight night. Frogs are croaking. An owl is calling with a queer cat-like sound. The Daina de Noche is in bloom & breathing out its intensely sweet odour. The whole night is full of it, it fills up like a cup with this scent.

Ah I wish you were here—there is *no one* to talk to. We see far too many people at the moment. But no one ever comes (or ever will come again) to whom I can *talk*. All is chatter—Ronnie was here with the Harewoods & I was happy to be with him but *he* talks to me—not I to him. Still that's a great deal.

Someone has twice been here (I think I wrote you) called the Princess Callimachy, a Ruman-

ian. We were excited when she wanted to come because we were told that she had known Proust. But she says she knew him very slightly, met him once or twice at parties, which was a disappointment. She is about 65, has been very rich & is now poor, wants to work, but finds no one wants to employ a woman of her age—I don't know if I exactly liked her but I felt sympathetic to her. I thought she was courageous in a hard world. Until quite recently she had some money, but now I gather everything has been confiscated & she has practically nothing to live on. She lives in a small cottage in Kent, or rather in part of it. She is quick and intelligent & has seen *mucho mundo* as the Spaniards say. But it's hard being a refugee & leaves its mark—like smallpox, as someone said about nobility in one of Gorky's books.

Oh dear, this pen is going the way of all pens—leaking, refusing to write. I always feel I might have been a writer if it hadn't been for pens. And my handwriting gets worse & wilder & uglier every day.

I got a letter from Bertrand Russell a few days ago, & *his* writing is just the same. I wish I could see him again, but I don't suppose I ever will.

I must stop. How good you are to send *The Manchester Guardian*, my favourite paper.

Lawyers! Law is wrong: that is what is wrong with lawyers—

Much love

Gamel

Reviews

John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest,
MORINE KRISSDOTTIR.

Macdonald, 1980, £8.95.

The approach taken by Morine Krissdottir in this book is, within limits, a useful and necessary one: useful, because it provides information that enriches the reader's perception; necessary, because some elements of Powys's overall achievement will remain inaccessible until his extensive reading and his imaginative recreation of previous texts are carefully explored. The view that Powys wrote from something called "personal experience", without a comprehensive and constantly active intellectual base, that his symbolic and magical lore is accidental, is simply inadequate for the study of his work. That we shall some day have a fully annotated *Glastonbury Romance* does not in every way seem a happy prospect, yet until we have such explication, Powys studies will remain parochial. In this sense, I believe Krissdottir's work to be preliminary rather than final, and exploratory rather than definitive.

The magical elements in Powys's fiction, Krissdottir argues, are based on questions that he posed about the nature of reality. Does it exist as something other than "impenetrable pieces of matter suspended in a void",¹ and if it does exist as a unity are we able to perceive it? From these questions follows the quest for the Age of Gold, the goal of all serious magicians, the conviction that we live in a unified creation which we can perceive and of which we can partake. The quest is the subject of ancient mythology, of the Grail legends, the alchemical tradition, Taoism, and several other magical-philosophical traditions. The first chapter, "The 'Mythology'", sets out the complicated web of mythic, religious, and magical associations—too diffuse to be called lines of thought—which she believes to have existed in Powys's mind throughout the long period of his creativity. She explains his achievement as a single continuing "magic hunt":

But it seems to me that this myth of the magic hunt can serve as a symbol of the convoluted questing of John Cowper Powys. His philosophy, personality, and art centred on,

or circled about, one question which, in a myriad of forms, obsessed him all his life: is there an invisible, superhuman world behind the visible world. (p. 41)

This first chapter is a useful one, but useful in a limited way. It does not convincingly establish how the variety of magical traditions cited became a part of Powys's imaginative experience, and without stronger citations, the references remain speculative. The references are so many (Francis M. Cornford and the Cambridge Anthropologists, Empedocles, Chuang Tzu, Henri Frankfort, Norman O. Brown, J. J. Bachofen, Mircea Eliade, Malinowski, Anagarika Govinda, Eric Neumann, amongst others) that a consistency of development, or a consistent perception of Powys's development, seems highly improbable. She establishes an extraordinary range of possibilities which it will be valuable, and even, for some, exciting to sort out and verify. It is her proposition that all of Powys's career can be explained in such terms, that it is a single continuing quest, with each work representing a stage along the way, which is most troublesome. It raises questions about the function of literature, of the novel in particular, and about the intricacies of human experience. Discussing the passage concerning the moment of mystical enlightenment from Govinda's *Foundation of Tibetan Mysticism*, she states: "Unfortunately, Powys could never convince himself completely that such a union of the antitheses was possible" (p. 30). Some readers will insist on "Fortunately" rather than "Unfortunately". Powys was a novelist, not a mystic. The novel form depends on antitheses, and it affirms dissonance.² Krissdottir's approach to the idea of the novel is questionable. We see this in her explanation of Powys's decision to write novels. She quotes a passage from *Visions and Revisions* in which Powys describes the mysterious journey, the "divine submersion", undertaken by El Greco's "visionaries". She comments:

This was a mystery his philosophy could not apprehend; and since he was 'so made that my imagination inevitably converts every mental process which is at all important to me into a ritualistic symbol', he began writing novels. Like the shaman who literally

recites himself into an ecstatic voyage to cosmic regions, Powys used his novels to transport him on his Grail Hunt. (p. 40)

The argument is not persuasive. Given such motivation, he might have undertaken a number of activities different from writing novels. Although ritual and symbol are present in his work, he had engagements other than ritualistic symbol-making in mind. It is, perhaps, because writing great novels is more significant than hunting the Grail that the sense of the passage should be reversed: Powys used the Grail Hunt, with other mythopoeic sources, to enliven, at times to direct, his commitment to the high imaginative vocation of becoming a serious novelist.

Once she turns to specific works, Krissdottir establishes a pattern of commentary, moving not by analysis, but by application: *here*, she suggests, is a theory of magic, or of mythology, or a modern commentary on magic or mythology, and *there* is where it fits Powys. The advantages are those of annotation; the disadvantages are those of non-discriminating interpretation and imposed exposition. For example, in the second and the third chapters—on *Autobiography* and the early novels, and *Wolf Solent*, respectively—useful allusions are drawn from magical lore that clearly enrich our reading. Particularly important are the discussions of the androgyne as “bisexual ‘primal being’” (pp. 55-56), the brother-friend or “twin” relationship (pp. 60-62), and the stages of the heroic journey through separation, initiation and return (p. 66). These and other explanations provide pertinent referential data and enforce the allusive character of Powys’s fiction. The regrets arise from the failure to have a full account of any single work, and the regrets are particularly strong in the case of *Wolf Solent*. Krissdottir focusses, indeed sheds light on Wolf’s refusal of Christie, but having established a line of explication she turns to other things, leaving much to be explained. She notes that what “stops Wolf is a vision he has in Christie’s bedroom” (p. 71), but she fails to mention that the vision is “the lamentable countenance of the man on the Waterloo steps!”. She identifies the vision as the water-imagery, the “greenish-coloured vapour”, described several paragraphs later in the scene. This obviously suits her purpose, but it fails as a reliable interpretation of the novel. She rightly emphasizes the illumination in the field of buttercups, but her reading of the relationships between this field of

gold, the rain-god Mukalog, and the notorious pig-sty (p. 77) cannot be supported by events as they take place in the novel. Any schematic reading of Powys would have to account, above all else, for a convincing and authoritative applicability to *Wolf Solent* in all its complexity of design and creation. This Krissdottir does not offer.

If *Wolf Solent* remains elusive, Krissdottir finds much to grasp in *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius*. In both of these texts—as in *Weymouth Sands* and *Owen Glendower*—Powys offers extensive and tempting symbolic references. Krissdottir cites a passage from Kenneth Hopkins’s *The Powys Brothers* in which Powys is reported to have said of *A Glastonbury Romance* that there “is a vague sort of parallel” to what Joyce did with the *Odyssey* (p. 84). She uses the passage to justify her approach, but Powys’s comment on the “vague sort of parallel” is surely a warning *against* the kind of pedantic exegesis appropriate to Joyce. Details which Krissdottir provides in the way of reference—for example, Sam’s role as a Grail Knight, Geard’s “fishing for Cybele” (p. 97), the pervasiveness of water imagery—enrich the symbolic perception of the work. The application is, however, too scant (Owen Evans is hardly discussed) to provide a comprehensive reading of the novel.

Krissdottir follows her syncretic approach in her discussion of the fittingly syncretic *Porius*. It is in this discussion that the advantages of annotation are most evident. The exposition of process as it relates to Porius’s advance through the stages of his refinement is provocative and valuable (pp. 133ff.). For many readers, the discussion will make *Porius* more accessible; for others even less accessible than at present. That the uncut *Porius* is a masterpiece remains to be seen, but for those devoted to the novel Krissdottir has offered a world of wonders. Intruders into this world must be wary, however, and exercise restraint. Take, for example, the reading of Porius and Morfydd’s union:

Immediately after her initiation, Morfydd and Porius meet and mate a second time. This union, unlike their first one, is a joyous and fulfilling one. Strictly speaking this second coming-together of the cousins is unnecessary so far as the story goes. It *does* show how closely Powys, who was not known for his celebration of normal sexual love, was following the alchemical stages. (p. 152)

This passage seriously misrepresents *Porius*: the statement on the "celebration of normal sexual love" demonstrates the almost whimsical ease by which a text—indeed a central concern—can be misrepresented in order to fit the needs of speculative theory.

Criticism and scholarship on John Cowper Powys will likely continue to be divided into, first, those who see the novels in traditional terms, based on the conflict of character, the continuity of action and theme, the particularities of language, in the articulation of the recognizable struggles of individual persons in society, and, secondly, those who see the novels primarily in "magical" terms, based in the revelation of schematic and hidden lore. *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* contributes important insights and information to this second group. Its successes are with those areas of Powys's achievement that are based on his interests in mythology and magic, with the "constant undercurrent of secret reference" (quoted, from Hopkins, on p. 84) to the Grail and other legends. But Krissdottir's study is not finally convincing in its attempts to establish this element of Powys as central, either to his artistic achievement or to his life. The book does, however, force commentators of the first group to respond forcefully to those elements in his work which she has illuminated.

Powys's imaginative energy is based in his scepticism: it is the energy of doubt, complemented by a compulsion to accept the world on available terms. Some of this compulsion is revealed in his willingness to search out and even use, as fitting, the lore of the magician in a variety of its manifestations. Morine Krissdottir has made some of these manifestations more accessible. But the great magic of Powys is his own astonishing achievement in *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Autobiography*, *Weymouth Sands*, and, in its partly disclosed way, *Porius*. These are works that cast their own spells.

BEN JONES

Notes

¹Morine Krissdottir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (London, Macdonald, 1980), p. 14. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

²Georg Lukács used the term "affirmation of a dissonance" in his discussion of the inner-form of the novel in *The Theory of the Novel*, translated by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1971), p. 72. *The Theory of the Novel* first appeared in 1916.

Twelve Poems,
SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER.

Chatto and Windus, 1980, £3.50.

Twelve Poems comprises some of Miss Warner's last and finest work and its publication this year, with a brief reminiscence by Peter Pears as preface, constitutes a posthumous tribute to the poet, novelist and story-writer whose writing life spanned six decades. It is ironical that in her lifetime Miss Warner never published a book so short as this and yet, the five previous collections being out of print, her reputation as a poet must for the time being rest on the merits of this book alone.

It is a slim volume in the style of Chatto and Windus's elegant productions of the 20s and 30s, so slim indeed that one might reasonably fear for its health; but within the meagre fourteen pages of *Twelve Poems* can be found a remarkably robust selection of work, displaying much of the lyric gift evident in her early books, freed at last from the somewhat mannered voice which intruded into many of those verses. The voice in these more recent poems is subdued and, often, chilling.

Who valets me at nightfall, undresses me
of another day,
Puts it tidily and finally away,
And lets in darkness
To befriend my eyes like an illusory caress?

(“Azrael”)

Miss Warner's expertise at handling ballad form is also evident in this volume. It was ever her forte—the best example is “Nelly Trim” (from *The Espalier*, 1925), taken from an East Chaldon legend—and in *Twelve Poems* she gives us the bleak “Ballad Story” and a delicate poem owing much to the traditions of folk-song, “Earl Cassilis's Lady”. This is a fine example of the tact with which Miss Warner chooses her language; the Earl has only to ask his wife, charmed out at night onto the snowy heath,

Was it the music called you down the stair,
Or the hot ginger they gave you then?
Was it for pleasure that you followed them
Putting off your slippers at the door
To dance barefoot and blood-foot in
the snow?

and there is no need for her to mention the word “gypsies” at all.

about the relation between author and narrator and persona long before they became a matter for arguments in literary theory.

Mr Finney does his best to keep his subject in focus but he is not to be blamed if Isherwood remains hard to pin down. English readers are still likely to be most interested in the first part of Isherwood's career; partly because of the continuing current preoccupation with the 1930s, and partly because Isherwood's Cheshire or London or Berlin seem denser and richer in literary terms than his California. In fact, pre-Hitler Berlin has become and is likely to remain an Isherwood invention. Mr Finney writes well about the literary history of the 30s, and clears up some disputed issues; in particular he shows that Auden and Isherwood were verifiably influenced by Brecht in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and the other verse-plays in which they collaborated. After the travels and crises and collisions with history of the 30s, Isherwood's forty-odd years in America have been fairly uneventful and there is less for Mr Finney to write about. As a critic, he is careful and judicious in discussing Isherwood's texts, though he does not altogether resist the temptation of putting in too much plot-summary of Isherwood's novels of the 50s and 60s, though this difficulty is inescapable in writing a critical biography of a novelist. He makes very good sense of Isherwood's early and late versions of fictionalized autobiography, *Lions and Shadows* and *Christopher and His Kind*, in the first of which homosexuality was a teasing absence, while in the second it was a central concern. One biographical puzzle that Mr Finney does not clear up relates to Isherwood's long and seemingly happy relationship with Hollywood as a scriptwriter. Other important writers, American and English, have revolted angrily or satirically against the well-paid servitude of the dream-factory, and made literature out of their revolt, but Isherwood seem to have been quite at home in Hollywood. One would like to know more about this side of Isherwood's character, but to go into it might demand a greater liberty of interpretation than is normally possible when dealing with a living subject, however co-operative. In so far as this elusive figure can be placed, though, Mr Finney has succeeded, and his book can be recommended.

BERNARD BERGONZI

Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s,

Editor, FRANK GLOVERSMITH.

Harvester, 1980, £20.00.

The 30s are always with us. As in interwar Britain the wire and trenches of the Somme lurked powerful and monitory in the collective consciousness, so in postwar Britain, from the 1945 election through the Welfare State to Macmillan's pleasure at our never having had it so good and on to current anguishes at the role of unemployment as an economic regulator, bleak images of the distressed areas of Lancashire and South Wales, of the hunger marches and the operation of the means test have functioned in modern memory as elements of a distinctive myth, a pocket holocaust to be remembered and shunned lest it return as the future. But—even if with some salutary consequences in larger social and cultural terms—the 30s have perhaps been over-rapidly mythologized; perhaps we turn too easily and exclusively to Orwell's Wigan, Greenwood's Salford, Gibbon's Duncairn, and Audén's landscapes of unease confrontations for our images. Priestley's *English Journey* displayed a map that gave other locations, and more recently historians such as Stevenson and Cook have emphasized different patterns to those of the distressed areas which, for all their lack of drama and human suffering, constitute other, real, experiences of the 1930s. Introducing this volume, Asa Briggs indicates the route to reassessment when he remarks that British history has been—and still is—the history of sub-cultures: “one single image of a lost decade” will never serve adequately. For an end more substantial than simply that of academic precision it is important to get the 30s right, to acknowledge where the myth falls short, is stylized, or is only too accurate in the picture of the decade that it presents: the multiple perspectives Briggs finds marshalled here, of “social history, the sociology of art and literature, political and ideological debate, cultural theory and socio-cultural practice” promise an appropriate response to the imperatives of the period in the diversity of its experience and testaments. Most of these essays indeed open doors: a few, however, seem keen to slam them shut (with not a few fingers in the way)—and it is the editor's essays, rather than those of his contributors, which fall into the latter category.

Frank Gloversmith's opening essay,

"Defining Culture", examines concepts of culture within the period, embracing John Cowper Powys's *The Meaning of Culture*, Clive Bell's *Civilization*, R. H. Tawney's *Equality*, T. S. Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society* and—quite legitimately—the later *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. This assiduous analysis of the socio-political assumptions—but more particularly the inconsistencies and confusions—lying behind these writers' thoughts on culture soon resolves into a highly sympathetic endorsement of Tawney and a relentless assault upon Powys, Bell and Eliot. Groversmith is concerned with laying bare what he sees as the authoritarian, the elitist, the anti-social, the illiberal, the inhumane, the irresponsible—and the downright selfish—in defences of culture which involved the acceptance of social injustice or oppression in their assumptions or projections. That said, admirers of John Cowper Powys and of *The Meaning of Culture* in particular, would be well advised to watch their blood-pressure, for Groversmith's hostility to Powys's "holiday task" (as John Cowper described the project to Theodore) is uncompromising. On the other hand, the hostility is somewhat predictable once one has attuned the mind's ear to the procrustean language and values of the essay (and in effect *has* been predicted, for example by T. J. Diffey in "John Cowper Powys and Philosophy", *PR*, I, ii, 27-39). From the observation of "removedness", of the "intransitive" and the "contemplative" in Powys's ideal of personal culture (terms which given the calculus of value operative must be understood in a pejorative sense), Groversmith moves quickly to a detection of the "philosophically pretentious" and the "mean-spirited", finding in Powys's stance "a bleak and priggish advocacy of privatism" in a work which approximates to "irate, grandiloquent moral melodrama". To extract the most severe strictures:

The claims to philosophical detachment, rational argument, and scholarly critique are just not tenable. The thinness of texture, the paucity of arguments, and the illiberality of feelings betray unexamined nihilism (behind its 'mysticism') and a cynicism about human relationships (behind its defence of the 'cultured self').

The best construction one can put upon this is that it is disproportionate; the worst, that it is hysterical. However, if Powys is made

something of a whipping-boy (and certainly unjustly so bearing in mind the far more actively illiberal company he keeps in this essay), Bell's arabesque dreams of the life of a privileged minority in a slave-society and Eliot's circuitous, heavy-handed endorsements of an accentuated version of the status-quo are no less forcibly attacked than Powys's "egoism". The enemy is identified as any argument that tends to valorize the achievement by a minority of heightened states of consciousness and life-style at the expense of the rest of society. But with what justice Powys finds himself first to the block on these charges is more problematic than the casual reader of these few pages is likely to imagine. The determination to set up a Powys-Bell-Eliot junta glosses over the very real difference that exists between the active mischief of Bell ("democracy and civilization are incompatible") and Eliot ("culture and equalitarianism . . . conflict"), and Powys's promotion of an ideal of culture capable of being pursued "under any gonfalon". This frustrating lack of delicacy afflicts the whole approach: the works are discussed as self-contained contributions to a prescribed concept of cultural theory, rather than as historically conditioned documents of rather less determinate—and certainly not identical—genre. As a consequence the executions are perhaps more pointless than painful. There are too many books of fifty years ago, Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* or *Etruscan Places*, or much of Wyndham Lewis for example, which if treated as if written for tomorrow's sociology seminar or next year's election, might just as easily be dispatched—and if they did present themselves as such, one would be happy to help Groversmith sharpen the axe. But they don't, and so the assault has little bearing on the value of reading these works—particularly in the very context out of which Groversmith writes. As head after head tumbles down into the basket, the thought must occur to the impartial observer that there are more constructive ways of dealing with the condemned—both guilty and innocent. (Tawney's *Equality* is another matter. If we are indeed into the realm of live political polemic, then more strength to Groversmith in promoting the reading of that humane, compassionate, and still highly engaged book—even if it is far less than Powys's, Bell's or Eliot's works a direct exploration of a version of culture, but rather an exposition of the need for the kind of social justice on which a common culture might flourish.)

Jeremy Hooker has recently pointed out in these columns two attractive directions for Powys criticism: the fostering of the habit of discussing the Powyses alongside well established writers in appropriate contexts, and the need for an "intelligent study of social influences and tensions in Powys lives and letters" on the premiss that it is "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". As is clear from Groversmith's essay, the realization of that first direction may be attended with rough knocks, but that possibility only underlines the need for the second. Here there is no attempt to relate *The Meaning of Culture* either to Powys's oeuvre at large, or to the man, his social milieu, or more particularly his response to that milieu. There is simply no mention of any other work by Powys, nor indeed of any of the available biographical material. (Groversmith claims the virtue of being orientated towards the text—but that does not inhibit judgements on the writers as individuals.) Here Powys remains simply a five-letter word, a collocation of signs responsible (or culpable) for something called *The Meaning of Culture*. But the reader of these pages who knows little of Powys will not suspect the journey from the milieu Angus Wilson has sketched to the condition of Timothy Hyman's "Holy fool"—a journey in which many ties are sustained and many eroded. He will not suspect the thirty years' lecturing in America, the trains and hotels, the practical commitment of the resident alien to sharing ideas and experiences with his proletarian audiences, the Jewish, Catholic and Communist minorities, the mid-west townships. (Inevitably those thirty years will elicit a frown as representing a mere "filtering down" of the bourgeois classics—but it was a very different kind of engagement to Bell's wispy half-hopes about the diffusion of civilization: indeed, it was an enterprise with as much akin to Tawney's W.E.A. work as to the spirit of Eliot's journals.) Nor will he suspect Powys's horror at even the residual odour of slavery in New Orleans (Bell, one assumes, would have snuffed it up), his attitude to Black Americans, to the unemployed, his disgust at those who fostered the "Negro Problem". There will be no suspicion of the defence of Eugene Debs, of his reflections on Sacco and Vanzetti, on police brutality, on the "anti-social brigandage and exploitation" of Wall Street. There is no hint of Powys's desire

expressed to Dreiser for "a real equity in our organised society", of his praise for the Russian Revolution, and his condemnation of the reality of Stalin, along with the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini, of his attraction towards Communism and of his prediction in 1914 that the future of the world would depend less on wars than on certain "vast economic changes", and "a war between international capital and international labour". And what of his praise for the Anarchists of Catalonia who had created "the first really self-respecting and completely free life for the working people of the world"? How true—and simultaneously how ludicrous in its selectivity—is this picture of John Cowper Powys: but Groversmith needs a Roland to his Oliver. There is no dispute that John Cowper Powys's social conscience was more capacious than his ability or desire to formulate social and political thought as such—but a version of him lacking any sense of that compassion and generosity, of his radical instincts, is inadequate: without some gesture towards the complexity of the man one is left with a caricature of vicious, deceitful and mystifying author behind *The Meaning of Culture* and to foster that impression is to risk practising the ungenerosity which Groversmith so admirably detests. It is, after all, in *The Meaning of Culture* that Powys celebrates the "class-destroying, intellect-defying passion for equality"; and it is there also that he speaks of the school of "treat 'em rough" who put it into our heads to "go rampaging around the world like so many irascible policemen, rapping with our bludgeons all the nervous human craniums who see and feel what we cannot see and feel".

In another place it might have been fitting to give priority to the similar treatment of Orwell in a later essay. "Reactionary", "disingenuous", "graceless", "hypocritical", "ungenerous", a writer of "moral melodrama" (again), concerned to give "fundamental reassurance" in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, this is a queerly partial picture of Orwell—and, it seems, is at root a response to Orwell's implying the "inefficacy of any systematic critique based on analysis of social systems": the sin against the Holy Ghost. By contrast, Auden's ambiguities escape surprisingly lightly: indeed, his early work is praised for "poetic gains that compensate for the blur and incidental vagueness". Better apostatize than antagonize.

Elsewhere, Valentine Cunningham's sparkling essay on "1930s Writers and Taking

Sides" has humour and insight. The tentatiousness of that symbol of 30s commitment, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, is deftly expounded, as is the real eclecticism of Graham Greene's *Night and Day* in its publication of the Leftist, the Rightist and the Indifferentist without apparent angst. Llewelyn Powys appears in one of Cunningham's sub-divisions of the supporters of Republic Spain: "people who, even if they were not exactly strangers to readers of *Left Review* or to the whereabouts of the *New Statesman* offices (or at least to the people who themselves starred in those circles) did help give the Popular Front idea some credence".

The latter movement provides John Coombes's topic, that "nauseous spectacle of bishops, Communists, cocoa-magnates, publishers, duchesses and Labour MPs marching arm in arm to the tune of *Rule Britannia*" as Orwell saw it before himself opting for his country right or left. Keeping the role of British Popular Frontism in appropriate proportion, Coombes does help illuminate the attractive accessibility of Communism (however illegitimate in the eyes of the orthodox) to individuals of the mid-1930s whose sympathies might otherwise not have moved so far to the left. By way of complement, Alun Howkins explores the creation of an alternative culture between 1930 and 1935 by the Communist Party, centring on the *Daily Worker*, but extending to theatre, sport and social entertainments: quietly positive, the essay persuades one of the existence of a substantial environment to which Edward Upward's writing now provides the most accessible literary link. Stuart Laing raises interesting connections between the techniques of John Sommerfield's novel *May Day* and the Mass Observation movement in their respective endeavours to represent collectivity of experience, while Martin Ceadel (in something a little too much of a survey) reviews reflections of the future war in popular literature between 1918 and 1939. David Mellor refreshingly opens a door onto the cultural politics of British art in the 1930s, though surprisingly manages to do it without mentioning Wyndham Lewis either as artist or as the author of *The Revenge for Love*, while Jane Lewis writes informatively and often disturbingly about the position of women in an excellent study. The volume closes with John Lowerson's "Battles for the Countryside"—an essay which once again asserts the possibility of a new perspective revealing a gleam of pre-

occupation running through the most disparate facets of the period. There are more perspectives to be explored, but for literary students hooked on a few big names and historians doubtful about the role of literature, film and art as evidence, this is a book which opens up the 30s.

PETER MILES

Theory and Personality: The Significance of T. S. Eliot's Criticism,

BRIAN LEE.

The Athlone Press, 1979, £9.95.

The two poles of literary-critical writing are, perhaps, those of manifesto and commentary. Creative artists excel at the former. Scholars, *epigoni*, and poets (like Coleridge) whose work is done tend towards the latter, more expansive mode. T. S. Eliot's most influential essays exemplify the declarative power, the revolutionary purpose and oracular brevity of a manifesto. They also have its drawbacks. Eliot fudges key terms, and seems more concerned to dominate the reader than to meet him in argument. His aggressive air of holding certain sweeping truths to be self-evident may hide the fact that these truths sometimes have little in common except his own strong interest in bringing them together.

The virtues and defects of Brian Lee's book are all the other way round. He advocates a close reading of Eliot's key essays in preference to the sort of exposition which irons out inconsistencies and tabulates key ideas. (Mr Lee's horror of tabulation is so strong that, though his prefatory chapter is entitled "Eliot's Four 'Theories'"—the inverted commas are characteristic—one is never quite sure which four he means.) In the event, *Theory and Personality* is based on the close reading of only one essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", using it as text for a prolonged rumination on Eliot's achievement and its significance today.

As a textual commentator, Mr Lee is illuminating and yet remarkably unsystematic. His suggestion that we should read criticism "with the same general attention that we give to a poem" is suspect since he acknowledges no obligation to attend to the *whole* of Eliot's essay. Many of its salient points he simply ignores. Instead, he concentrates on those passages which contribute to the theme of artistic impersonality

(or, as he would call it, personality/impersonality). Eliot's criticism, on this view, is pre-eminently the expression of Eliot the poet; its pedagogic aspects (those which pointed to the foundation of more than one critical school) are largely taken as read.

What did it mean to *be* Eliot, to write those essays (and those poems)—and how do his pre-occupations and disabilities relate to ours? Mr Lee has no doubts that "Eliot's predicament is our predicament", and the following is characteristic of his viewpoint and style:

Eliot, throughout his life in criticism and poetry was trying to create the wholeness of poems at a time when the relationship was reversed, when poetic-intuitive life was subordinated to the measure of science (and science in a state of optimism) and its "objective" reducing and separating method.

Eliot himself shows, in some of his most famous pronouncements, a twentyish fixation with scientific vocabulary; Mr Lee is suitably sharp on this. Moreover, he is suffering from the very personality-disorders and divisions that his criticism diagnoses so memorably. His poetry is made out of those divisions, which happen to be symptomatic of modern civilization in general—an observation which is both a cause and a consequence of Eliot's greatness. Yet Eliot's is a flawed achievement, and flawed in ways to which, since his death, we have become increasingly sensitive. Mr Lee strongly implies that the modern world does offer examples of "wholeness" and "balance" which help us to see the limitations of Eliot's split personality. His reference-points are Lawrence and Leavis, and—less predictably—Rilke and Simone Weil.

The book ends with a fine dialectical flourish, which deserves to be cited by future commentators on Eliot: "True personality and true impersonality are the same thing". *Theory and Personality* is an absorbing and exacting piece of work, which fails, in the end, to reconcile one to the author's unbuttoned and wilfully idiosyncratic mode of procedure. Among various instances where his personal prejudices seem to obtrude, the one that sticks in the mind is his cavilling over the passage in "The Metaphysical Poets" in which Eliot refers to an "ordinary man" who "reads Spinoza". Eliot seems to me to be hinting that that "ordinary man" may be the same individual as the "poet" from whose operations (following the dictates of his impersonality theory) he feels obliged to dissociate

him. To take the passage as involving some sort of sociological observation is simply to fall into one of Old Possum's traps. I have no doubt that Mr Lee would have objected just as strongly if he had been faced with an "ordinary man" who was listening to the noise of the football rattle and reading the *News of the World*. The critical commentator needs to summon all his self-discipline if he is to avoid that kind of mistake.

PATRICK PARRINDER

Rebel's Progress,

TOM FARLEY.

Gwasg Gomer, 1979, £2.25.

How very difficult it is to avoid the cliché in Wales! Details of landscape (pit winding-gear, mountains), of language and dialogue, the names of places and people and their work and leisure, all now carry the stain of sentimentality and the risk of cliché. History and literature have named and over-named them all. During a recent season of old films about Wales shown on television the audience, despite itself, must often have winced at decent truths like the scarfed women waiting at the pithead for news, the unemployed hanging about steep terraced streets, the pitboots clattering, the choirs, the chapels, the sheep. Yet some of the films were excellent, speaking as they did for their day, before the word-glut of Dylan Thomas, before we had a surfeit of our own imagery.

But art makes the world new. Those Welsh writers of the 1980s who avoid our clichés are, on the whole, living and working here now, have their own view, real and present, and a freshly informed style. The versions of Wales possessed by R. S. Thomas, Roland Mathias or John Ormond are described by powerfully individual voices. Those like Leslie Norris and Dannie Abse with addresses in both Wales and England have retained, at a little distance, accurately observed views. John Tripp and Harri Webb mock and use the clichés to suit their purposes, John Tripp never sentimental, Harri Webb often so.

The hardest task is that of the exiled Welshman who writes of Wales, surely not only from reasons of nostalgia but because the root of all poetic vitality feeds deeply on the sub-soil of childhood and adolescence. For Tom Earley, exiled a long, long time in London, the dilemma is acute. His talent for observation and musical

ear are clearly in evidence. He is good on weather,

As drowsy child with chalk
Fills in with concentrated care
The blackboard-landscape lines
already drawn
(“Snow at Night”)

Today has been a blue and silver day,
Of all the days the kind I like the best.
Such days are fashioned out of wind and rain.
(“Blue and Silver”)

Or when his young daughter’s raft was blown
out to sea in a sudden Mediterranean squall,

her fury
Stung me like the wind whipping the foam,
Her anger memorable as the mistral.
(“Contretemps at Aygulf”)

He is excellent on pigeons, describing a crippled
pigeon thus:

His feet have been eaten away by disease
Leaving thin disfigured stumps which make
Standing difficult and landing a shock of pain
(“Pigeons”)

and

Rigoletto limping distractedly
Across the stage singing his disjointed aria
(“Pigeons”)

or real wood-pigeons, a cut above the rock-
doves and stock-doves,

They live a country life, consuming new
Hawthorn leaves and fresh flowers of elm.

The sequence ends with the sentence the wood-
pigeon speaks:

The nest, to our delight
And wonder, has inside
A paschal egg plain white
For Easter-tide.
Take two cows, taffy, take two
Coo roo coo, roo coo, coo roo.
(“Pigeons”)

About Bloomsbury, where he lives, he writes
well. From his flat he observes the weather, the
seasons, the pigeons and trees of Bloomsbury
Square, the Chinese sumach trees outside his
window,

At night we hear them coming
to touch our window panes

with green and bony hands
and nervous fingers drumming.
(“Sumachs in Bloomsbury”)

It is in the Bloomsbury poems that Tom
Earley’s voice is confident, and here he ex-
periments with rhythms and rhyme-schemes,
with sonnets, villanelles and rounds, his range
wide and his ear true.

If at the last this handsomely produced book
of 62 poems fails to carry me wholeheartedly
with it then it is due not to an inadequacy of
Tom Earley’s talent or to imperfections of the
poet’s eye or ear but to a failure of his nerve and
a failure to resolve the dilemma of writing at
great geographical and chronological distance
from the heart of the subject which is the heart
of him as a poet. It is, he knows himself, some
(not all) of the Welsh poems which fail:

I search for precious words in praise of Wales
With imagery and idiom mine alone
But find that every finished poem fails.
(“Rejection Slip”)

Even in good poems like “The Blacksmith” the
fault (in the geographical sense) jars, the nerve
fails, and it ends lamely

Even dreams can be occupational hazards.

or

spring onions which chilled
the throat (jibbons we called them)
(“For What We Have Received”)

where jibbons are explained, translated, rather
than used with confidence as the only, the right,
the first language giving the local and therefore
universal power that is found in, for example,
the footnote-free poetry of Seamus Heaney.

Tom Earley leaves the reader intrigued by the
problem of displacement. The dilemma of exile
has been resolved before and most recently and
successfully, it seems to me, by Jeremy Hooker
in his beautiful *Englishman’s Road* where he has
used exile and its attendant restlessness to fill a
loved but foreign Welsh landscape with the
light and shadow of his own ghosts.

Rebel’s Progress convinces me that there is life
enough in Tom Earley yet for him to consider
taking a Welshman’s road.

GILLIAN CLARKE

Plot, Story and the Novel: From Dickens and Poe to the Modern Period,
ROBERT L. CASERIO.

Princeton University Press, 1979, \$15.00.

Caserio's book is a study of the novel, in terms of its use of plot and story, from Dickens to Beckett. He is concerned with the different uses made of plot and story by novelists and argues that if writers and readers reject these principles of organization, then this is accompanied by a loss of faith in the meaning and moral value of action. He sees modernism in terms of such a rejection in that it represents a distrust about what can be made intelligible, purposeful or moral, and therefore constitutes a rejection of life. For Caserio the novel represents meaningful action and not quietism and purposelessness. His claim is that the problem that affects fiction is also a problem in life: it is formal in terms of plot and story, and moral and intellectual in terms of life. His study is largely an analysis of this rejection of faith.

Beginning with Dickens, story is seen as a means by which life is made intelligible in that it is able to discriminate moral values. To be committed to plot and story is to be committed to continuity and definite meaning as opposed to sterility arising out of abstract theorizing. For Caserio, story is not merely a sequence of events but a means of gaining access to meaning through an examination of the relations between phenomena. At the same time plot should be not only intellectual but emotional and moral, and it must also be grounded in action and thus become dynamic. If fiction deals with the misguided perspective of characters, then it can use peripety or reversal as a transforming element whereby significant differences can be construed and access gained to true meaning. In this sense plot represents a theorizing and generalization which "simultaneously presents life's manifold, dispersed phenomena and analyses and establishes as true life's intelligibility and coherence" (p. 28). In contrast, modernism tends towards abstracted thought in which only fictional relations are relevant.

It could be argued that a faith in peripety makes a virtue of necessity, in that it enables us to maintain that human experience and understanding are not necessarily true, but that by reversal we gain insight into truth by implication. This would suggest a faith in an ultimate meaning which is simply obscured by

human experience. For the modernist, the ambiguity endemic to human experience adds to life's richness; whereas if only one true perspective remains then all human thought must be subservient to that or at least must be viewed in relation to that ultimate meaning.

Caserio argues that modernism tends towards abstraction and therefore sterility because it lacks faith in moral and intellectual achievement. Yet his view of modernism is rather narrow and this narrowness of view is related to Caserio's method of analysis. Believing that plot and story rescue life from chaos and indeterminacy of meaning, he judges the effectiveness of modern works by their capacity to fulfil this pattern or at least to conform to it. It is as if he has formulated his ideal pattern of plot development and that novelists are then evaluated in accordance with their acceptance of that pattern. Without plot and story there can be no access to truth and if plot and story are rejected so too is access to truth, moral and intellectual. But if Caserio's system is rejected as unusable, writers cannot possibly be considered failures because they do not conform to it.

It is almost as if Caserio would have us return to a world in which access to moral insight can be achieved: he does not claim to have keys to the kingdom of truth but suggests that plot, as he defines it, can allow us a view of that kingdom. What he is not able to show is that that kingdom actually exists outside of a fiction which he is concerned with creating. Whether we would be better morally if we embrace Caserio's view cannot be proved for his is a vision of faith. To the modernist the whole conception of faith has been laid open to doubt and therefore to embrace a conception of truth as a means of revitalizing life would simply be a concession to illusion. It is not simply a matter of the modernist playing with forms as abstracted play but of trying to come to terms with and transcend the very forms which have made a pretence of representing meaning. To use Caserio's terms, the final realization comes about as a result of peripety in that we gain insight through a reversal which shatters previously held opinions. A faith in story may make life easier to deal with but that does not make it any less artificial.

Caserio also suggests that modern fiction works against itself in that although the form may suggest meaninglessness, as in Joyce and Woolf, yet the possibility of meaningfulness is

ever present. Modernism strives against the natural tendency of language towards meaning so that for Lawrence the desire to subvert meaning is in constant conflict with narrative meaningfulness. This is the modernist dilemma for the tools we use have traditionally tended toward structure and meaning and so, as with the Beckettian protagonist, although we may desire silence the only way we can voice that silence is through language—for that is the human condition.

Although Caserio claims not to have written a polemic in favour of plot and story, and that he has sympathy with the anti-narrative tradition, we are always aware that he favours plot and story as against modernist strategies. In that

sense his claim is at variance with what the book actually presents. Caserio hankers after order and the accessibility of truth through character and event in fiction, but he does not acknowledge that we can have access to meaning through the workings of prose fiction itself. This may start from the position of rejection and negativity in that it refuses to use plot and story and even makes fun of them, but that does not mean that there are not positive elements within such workings. It is of this that criticism should be aware and to which criticism should address itself.

PHILIP BENTLEY

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PHILIP BENTLEY lectures in General Studies at Bridgnorth College of Further Education. He has researched in the field of narrative technique by way of studies of Flann O'Brien, and of Muriel Spark, B. S. Johnson, John Barth, Donald Barthelme and Robert Coover. His publications include articles on poverty, housing and charity.

BERNARD BERGONZI is a Professor of English in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Warwick. His books include *The Early H. G. Wells* (Manchester U.P., 1961), *Heroes' Twilight* (Constable, 1965), *The Situation of the Novel* (Macmillan 1970; rev. ed. 1979), *T. S. Eliot* (Macmillan, 1972), *The Turn of a Century* (Macmillan, 1973), *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Macmillan, 1977) and *Reading the Thirties* (Macmillan, 1978).

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).

GILLIAN CLARKE, poet, is the Editor of *The Anglo-Welsh Review*. Collections of her poetry include *Snow on the Mountain* (Christopher Davies, 1971) and *The Sundial* (Gomer Press, 1978).

T. J. DIFFEY is a Reader in Philosophy at the University of Sussex. He is the Editor of *The British Journal of Aesthetics* and since 1967 he has published articles on aesthetics regularly in the *British Journal*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *Ratio*.

CLAIRE HARMAN is Co-ordinating Editor of *PN Review*. She is at present editing the *Collected Poems* of Sylvia Townsend Warner for Carcanet Press.

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; Norwood Editions, 1978). His contribution to *Byron's Political and Cultural Influence in nineteenth-century Europe* (ed. P. G. Trueblood), will be published in 1981 by Macmillan and Humanities Press.

JOHN HODGSON lectures for the British Council at the University of Pristina, Yugoslavia. In 1980 he was awarded a Ph.D. by the University of Newcastle for a thesis on John Cowper Powys.

KENNETH HOPKINS after a career in journalism has been a Professor of English at various universities in the U.S.A. during the last twenty years. He has published about fifty books including critical studies, mainly on poetry, especially satire, and also *The Powys Brothers* (Dent, 1967). His *Collected Poems 1935-1965* and *Collected Poems 1966-1977* gather the contents of 22 separate collections.

EMYR HUMPHREYS, poet and novelist, has published some sixteen novels since 1946, winning various awards: the Somerset Maugham, 1953, the Hawthornden, 1959, the Welsh Arts Council, 1972 and 1979. His latest novels are *National Winner* (1971), *Flesh and Blood* (1974), *Landscapes* (1976), *The Best of Friends* (1976) and *The Anchor Tree* (1979). He has just completed a book on the development of Welsh identity ("an Historical Companion to people interested in my novels") to be published by the Black Raven Press, possibly entitled *A View of a Hidden Kingdom*.

MARY BARHAM JOHNSON, daughter of Henry Barham Johnson and Catherine Bodham Donne (both of the family of "The Powys Mother": see the Johnson-Donne Pedigree), born in 1895, won a Harp Scholarship to the Royal College of Music, 1910-1913, qualified for an English Honours degree at Oxford, 1917, and after various teaching posts, was finally a lecturer in English and Music, Norwich College of Education. She is engaged in a study of the poet William Cowper and his family.

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

G. WILSON KNIGHT, Professor Emeritus of Leeds University, was previously Chancellor's Professor of English, Trinity College, University of Toronto (1931-1941) and Professor of English Literature, Leeds University (1946-1962). His publications include works of autobiography, biography, poems and a play; his many critical works include *The Wheel of Fire*, *The Imperial Theme*, *The Christian Renaissance*, *The Starlit Dome*, *The Golden Labyrinth*, *The Saturnian Quest*, *Shakespearean Production*, *Shakespeare and Religion*, *Byron and Shakespeare*, *Vergil and Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge*.

DENIS LANE is a Professor of English at John Jay College, The City University of New York. He is Literary Editor for the current affairs monthly *USA Today*, and he has articles forthcoming on *Maiden Castle* (*C.U.N.Y. English Forum*, 1980) and on *Porius* (*Papers on Language and Literature*, S. Illinois University, 1981).

PETER MILES lectures in English literature at Saint David's University College, Lampeter. He is Reviews Editor of *The Powys Review*, a frequent reviewer for *The Library*, and has published articles on eighteenth and twentieth century fiction.

PATRICK PARRINDER is a Reader in English at the University of Reading. His books include *H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge, 1972), *Authors and Authority* (Routledge, 1977), *Science Fiction: A*

Critical Guide (Longman, 1979) and *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* (1980).

JOHN E. ROBERTS, at first a solicitor in Llan-gollen, worked in journalism for the steel industry from 1927 to 1973 and was Editor of *The Refractories Journal*.

KIM TAPLIN is the author of *The English Path* (Boydell Press, 1979).

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