

The Powys Review

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The Powys Review

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John Cowper Powys: Corwen. A photograph from Louis Wilkinson, *Welsh Ambassadors*, 1936.

Roland Mathias

John Cowper Powys and 'Wales'. A limited study*

In an essay entitled "The Sacrificial Prince: A Study of *Owen Glendower*" which I wrote for Belinda Humfrey's *Essays on John Cowper Powys* (1972) I came to certain conclusions about 'Powys and Wales' which, to an extent, I now regard as impressionistic rather than well-judged. I commented, first, that in Wales "the animal and vegetable levels of sensibility, so intermingled with the human in other Powys novels" are rapidly squeezed out and that what results is "a relatively thin diet of 'atmospheric' food".¹ Secondly, Dinas Brân, the ancient grass-covered fortress which crowns the mountain above Llangollen, although it appears to Rhisiart, the homecoming student who has something of the 'homecoming' John Cowper in him, "the castle of his imagination" and "not less [but] *more* than the picture he had in mind",² is soon revealed as little more than marginal to the thrust of the narrative and ultimately lost in a confusion of symbols.³ "Tis our wold Corfe, looks 'ee", declares Jimmy Mummer, "Ees, 'tis wold Corfe to the image this toomble-down pleace",⁴ but this attempt to import some of the Dorset magic is unconvincing. Thirdly, except perhaps in the Forests of Tywyn, the 'emanations' of landscapes in Wales—despite one or two fine naturalistic descriptions—are on the whole perfunctory and minimal in comparison with those found in J.C.P.'s Dorset novels. I continued as follows:

the landscape of Wales and its myth-impregnation . . . did not afford JCP the degree of sustenance which he had readily obtained from the chalklands of his childhood. This . . . need not be matter for surprise. Anyone of sensitivity who has contemplated those

south lands in silence and alone, noting their swelling feminine breasts and the dramatic bareness which seems to whisper continually of the . . . Celts or pre-Celts who once were there and now are not, might—according to background and disposition—either share JCP's sense of deprivation in Wales or breathe a sigh of relief. The chalk is an empty arena in which the first achievement of man in his emergence from the savage has audible echoes. They are there, whispering around overt memorials like Stonehenge, the Cerne Giant or the White Horse, and there, even more, in the mute unapologetic pride of the Earth-Mother.⁵

Wales, in comparison, was poor and backward and could be seen by Powys only as a mountainous refuge, in which "the rough masculine nature of the terrain . . . speaks of defence, not of an opulence of power."⁶

I call this verdict *impressionistic* because it is partly visual, partly historical, and literarily based, with less than complete care, on one book. Defence, and even more defeat, generates its own myths and J.C.P., accustomed to evasion, propitiation and defeat, was fascinated by them. Nothing was farther from his interest than "an opulence of power". Even a reading of *Owen Glendower* less concerned with the improbability of the Prince's successes might have noticed more carefully his refusal of the ultimate victory at Woodbury Hill in the Abberleys, where his camp overlooked the Severn crossing at Holt:

His chance had been given him; and something in his own nature had balked. He thrust his hand under his pillow of rugs and touched the rusty bronze that had been the death of that old peace-maker of Dinas Brân; and as he did so the impression came over him . . . that

*A revised version of a paper delivered to the Powys Society, August 1985.

he and his people *could afford to wait*, could afford to wait till long after his bones were dust and Henry's bones were dust. He knew how his own soul could escape, escape without looting cities and ravishing women . . .⁷

C. A. Coates thinks this the answer to the "historical puzzle"⁸ of why Owain wasted this opportunity amongs others. Any historian of the period, however, would make it entirely plain that the retreat from Woodbury Hill was a matter of military necessity. No ultimate victory was possible. Glendower's decision in the book was as Powysian as the description of the Prince in his last hiding-place under the Gaer-mound: the land of Wales, says our author, is the preserve of the *mythology of escape*:

This race avoids and evades, pursues and is pursued . . . Alone among nations it builds no monuments to its princes, no tombs to its prophets. Its past is its future, for it lives by memories and in advance it recedes. The greatest of its heroes have no graves, for they will come again. Indeed, they have not died; they have only disappeared.⁹

This is a very particular Wales, with a mythic charge apparently quite different from the one that John Cowper gave his Wessex landscapes. It is necessary, I think, to examine the whole question again.

What emerges may well be a more confused answer, as confused indeed as J.C.P. sometimes seems to have been himself. It must be said, however, that the re-examination offered here takes place within very limited parameters, for *in extenso* the nature and meaning of Powys's relationship with Wales might well be worth as many as three or four critical essays. What I have done is to add a close examination of *Maiden Castle* to that of *Owen Glendower* and to draw together a few threads from *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Porius*, *Autobiography*, *Letters to his Brother Llewelyn* and *Obstinate Cymric*. I chose *Maiden Castle* because it was the last novel J.C.P. wrote before leaving Dorset. If it was completed at Corwen in North Wales its inspiration and theme are mediated entirely by his native area. It is also the only one of his major novels that he

wrote while actually *living* in Dorset, a matter of some importance if one is to measure the maturity of response as between a Dorset novel and a Welsh one. Where *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* were evocations, from Phudd Bottom, Hillsdale, New York State, of the remembered landscape of youth, embroidered with the richer patterns of mature emotion and later reading, *Maiden Castle* was face to face, so to speak, an entirely contemporary response to the excavations of Mortimer Wheeler on the site of the title. C. A. Coates comments that "the rich complexity and physical density of the earlier novels is missing"¹⁰ and goes on to echo G. Wilson Knight by describing the Dorchester of the novel as "a vague if unspecified locality", a verdict which, in any context other than that of Powys's own work, might be remarked as odd. For my part, I would describe *Maiden Castle* (after due allowance for cuts) as the most closely controlled of all J.C.P.'s novels: the cast of characters is limited, the narrative stripped of unnecessary digressions and, comparatively speaking, of irrelevant ideas: and the insertion of the mythic element into the concerns of more normal society (though what Powysian society is ever truly normal?) is gradually and carefully done. Those hostile to my thesis here may well argue that it is in *Maiden Castle* that John Cowper comes closest to reading like another and more ordinary novelist and that that in itself is damning. I would reply that it is in *Maiden Castle* that he demonstrates for the first time some of the elements of novelistic technique missing earlier—such as imagining the shape of his story from the beginning, knowing how much one may reasonably get into 496 pages instead of carrying on like "a Stonehenge Bard of Interminable Prose Narrative",¹¹ and curbing his authorial self-indulgence in the interest of developing characters who are neither embodiments of an idea nor simply aspects of the Powys ego. Angela Blaen has written very revealingly¹² of the way in which *Maiden Castle* is based on the Celtic calendar, pointing out, amongst many other things, how Dud meets

Nance in the cemetery at Samhain, the beginning of the Celtic month of the dead, and, in the last section called 'Full Circle', returns with her to the same spot the November following. There is a tightness about this that is untypical of Powys's other works.

Let me, however, begin my topic at the beginning, with what J.C.P. tells us in *Autobiography*. It was at Shirley in Derbyshire that he declared himself to be "the Lord of Hosts"¹³ and first desired to be a magician. It was at Shirley too that his father's eyes burned,

with a fire that was at once secretive and blazing, like the fire in the eyes of a long dis-crowned king, when he told us how we were descended from the ancient Welsh princes of Powysland. From an old Welsh family long ago established in the town of Ludlow in Shropshire in what were formerly called the Welsh "Marches" we undoubtedly did—Princes or no Princes—as the genealogies put it, "deduce our lineage"; and I am inclined to think that there has seldom been a mortal soul—certainly no modern one—more obstinately Cymric than my own.¹⁴

There are as many as four oddities about this development. The first is that the "obstinate, incurable romanticist"¹⁵ was Celticised not by anything Welsh but by hearing his father read from Aytoun's *Scottish Cavaliers*. The second, perhaps not so odd, is that John Cowper caught from his father not the staid connection with Ludlow but the blazing fire that called up princes—something he joked over afterwards rather than acknowledged. The third is that Charles Francis Powys should have cherished any such distant genealogical tradition, for as Littleton, the brother second to John and the only other who might have noted that same fire, pointed out, "the family had been in England for four hundred years and that, in spite of its name, there was no real proof of Welsh origin".¹⁶ The fourth is the probability that C. F. Powys's pride in his supposed origins was never again shown so clearly as at Shirley to his eldest son, perhaps because of shyness as the family increased, for of John Cowper's brothers only the Llewelyn whose name may

have been his father's last patriotic gesture warmed to them at all. When Louis Marlow entitled his book on the Powys family *Welsh Ambassadors* Bertie called it "pretending and false"¹⁷ and it was characteristic of Llewelyn that he liked it most of all because in some shires 'Welsh Ambassador' was a name for a cuckoo.¹⁸ Marlow, however, stuck to his guns, declaring that every member of the family was more Celtic than Saxon and that

because I have no Celtic blood, because I am Saxon and Latin, and entirely gentile . . . I feel . . . John Cowper the most Celtic and Jewish of his family . . .¹⁹

The latter blood-trait supposedly descended from a maternal great-grandmother.

This childish Welsh patriotism of John Cowper's would have been squeezed out, one might think, by the pressures of living, learning and working in England. But no. When he was living at Burpham it flared up again.

. . . I suddenly acquired a passion for everything Welsh. I bought Welsh grammars, Welsh dictionaries, Welsh modern poetry. I bought an elaborate Welsh Genealogy, called "Powys-Fadoc", and mightily chagrined was I when I found no mention of my father's ancestors in it! I bought everything I could lay hands on that had to do with Wales and with the Welsh people. Alas! I had not learnt yet . . . that Providence had deprived me of the least tincture of philology. I soon gave up trying to learn Welsh. But the *idea* of Wales and the *idea* of Welsh mythology went drumming on like an incantation through my tantalized soul. I had no vision so far—that was still to come—of myself as a restorer of the hidden planetary secrets of these mystical introverts of the world, but the gods having made me, instead of a conscientious scholar, an imaginative charlatan, I resolved to realise with my whole spiritual force what it meant to be descended—to the devil with "Powys Fadoc"—from those ancient Druidic chieftains!²⁰

This rebirth of the passion was connected with the birth of his son. John Cowper was thirty, his father sixty. It was time to revert to thoughts about ancestry. But his recourse

to the six volumes of Chevalier Lloyd, as he was called,²¹ did not need to disappoint him unless his concept of the Wales he was looking for was already well developed; for Powys Fadog, named after Madog ap Gruffudd, was no more than a northerly part of Powys created in the early thirteenth century, the centre of which was Dinas Brân above Llangollen. It may be argued from his disappointment that the Brân connection was already forming in his mind, but the more immediate meaning that Wales had for him was that of refuge or hiding-place. He wondered whether he should not sell his house and retire there with his family, the more urgently when he had a quarrel on his hands. How his friends would be confounded!

Two battlecries, so to speak, kept sounding on in the background of my misanthropic heart. One was: "I have a son, a son, a *son*, who, as he grows up, will take my side against the world". The other was: "I have Wales, Wales, *Wales*, to take refuge in, where I can send my enemies to the Devil and possess my soul in peace".²²

It is impossible not to believe that in these early groans and imaginings lies the beginning of the *mythology of escape* with which he endowed Wales. The Welsh became what he was himself, avoiders and evaders, pursuers and pursued, guerillas on the edge of the great orthodoxies.

How John Cowper's reading on Welsh subjects went is not afterwards documented in *Autobiography*, but the impassioned reference-list of Owen Evans in *A Glastonbury Romance*, which was published in 1932, reveals that he had not been idle in the field.²³ The Book of Taliesin, The Triads, Dafydd ap Gwilym, Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion*, Sir John Rhys, The Red Book of Hergest, the Vitae Gildae and The Black Book of Carmarthen—I present them in Owen Evans's order—were all within his knowledge, but of these the work of Sir John Rhys, referred to again in *Maiden Castle*, seems to have been the most influential in shaping his concept of Wales. Sir John, who died in 1915, was the first

Professor of Celtic at Jesus College, Oxford, and the greatest of the pioneer scholars of Wales at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁴ From his major works, in particular *The Welsh People* (1900) which he wrote in collaboration with David Brynmor Jones, and *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (2 volumes, 1901 and recently reprinted in paperback) we may discern one of the main bases for the shape that John Cowper Powys took for his refuge-land of Wales. Broadly, Sir John argued that the comprehensive Brythonicisation of Wales was comparatively late: it did not take place, in his opinion, until the coming of Cunedda from Manau Gododdin (the region about Stirling) at or towards the end of the fourth century A.D. Before that time, in Wales as in what we now call southern England, the dominant power was vested in the Goidels, an earlier wave of Celtic invaders, under whose rule substantial numbers of aboriginal inhabitants, in whom Rhys was more than ordinarily interested, not merely survived but reasserted their cultural ethos. By the time of the Roman invasion, he concluded, only the Ordovices amongst Brythonic tribes had penetrated Wales: their settlement covered mid-Wales as far as the western coast. Both north and south Wales, therefore, were for as many as four centuries Goidelic rather than Brythonic, with a continuing proportion of aboriginal inhabitants higher than would be found later in those parts of England affected by Scandinavian settlement—an argument that has a bearing on J.C.P.'s view of Wales as *the last refuge*. Largely on philological grounds, Sir John was inclined to identify the aboriginals with the Picts and was disposed to believe that the whole story of Brân (or Bendigeidfran) and his sister Branwen, narrated in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, was Pictish in origin. He was, indeed, prepared to widen the field further: "the stories", he wrote,

which I have loosely called Goidelic may have been largely aboriginal in point of origin, and by that I mean native, pre-Celtic and non-Aryan.²⁵

That almost every tenet of this thesis of Sir John's has been discarded by the scholarship of today is not our main point here. His views constituted what was available to John Cowper in the twenties and earlier and our interest should be directed, first and foremost, to what the latter made of them. It is plain that John Cowper was even more interested in the aboriginals than Rhys was: for him their imagined community was anarchistic, unaggressive, unambitious, prepared to go to the wall rather than resist (choosing Death rather than Life as Broch puts it in *Owen Glendower*):²⁶ they lived by feeling and imagination rather than by intellect and will (something which he claims later for the Welsh on the basis that they are mostly aboriginals):²⁷ if attacked or subjugated, they evaded and propitiated until, as time passed, they could free themselves within their new community to live their lives as they wished. Another point made by Rhys in this context interested John Cowper: he drew attention to the wholesale desertion of the Church of England for more democratic forms of organisation and worship from the eighteenth century onwards in Wales, as in Cornwall and the highlands of Scotland, a desertion for which England offered no clear parallel. J.C.P.'s interest in this relates to his main thesis: unattracted by any prescriptive form of Dissent or even of Democracy, he contrives to see in this historical development the Welsh defending themselves against both Rome and Canterbury. It was "a triumph of community religion over ecclesiastical religion".²⁸

It is not necessary to labour the respects in which this aboriginal stereotype reflected John Cowper's view of himself: but as an ideal it was compromised for him by the name *Welsh*—historically applied to invaders whom Sir John Rhys saw as both *late* and more oppressive than their predecessors—and by his own imaginings of princely forebears. For the moment I wish only to register, in preliminary fashion, the reconciling focus of The Head of Bendigeidfran, that portion of Welsh mythology which most seized John Cowper's imagin-

ation and held it throughout his vision of the union he made of himself and Wales.

Before I come to explain and describe the phenomenon of The Head, however, let me remove from major consideration what some may well regard as an essential part of my subject. I called this "a limited study" and one of the things I mean by that is that I shall be concerned only peripherally in this paper with those aspects of the Arthurian cycle of stories that appear far from any origin in Wales. It will not be my business, for example, to consider the Grail in any of its appearances. These are essentially *British*, in the old sense of that word—though in their provenance they are Norman, Breton, French and finally English. They belong, as used by John Cowper, to the Glastonbury of his *Romance*. Again, it will not be my concern to discuss the significance of John Crow's vision of a sword resembling King Arthur's falling into the Brue not far from Pomparlès Bridge. On the other hand, the difference in demeanour between John Crow and Owen Evans at the *aboriginal* monument of Stonehenge does fall within John Cowper's parameters of *Welshness* and is therefore relevant to my investigation: so is Evans's view of Glastonbury as the Land of Annwn, *yr Echwyd*, "where the shores are of Mortuorum Mare, the Sea of the Departed".²⁹ In *A Glastonbury Romance* the later Arthurian and Sangreal elements, of course, are treated as "all of a piece" with the earlier Welsh and in the local context they do follow on: close observation, however, reveals that Owen Evans, the Welshman, is usually concerned only with those elements that truly belong to Wales. In that sense he is intrusive both as a character and as an interpreter.

The facets of his heritage and his philosophy which John Cowper found difficult to reconcile one with another were, as we have seen, the princely or chieftainly and the escapist. The one required a territory and power, the other a terrain in which to find refuge. It is important, I think, that we do not dismiss the former as irrelevant or accidental. John Cowper's descent from the Princes of Powys may seem more jokey than

real, but there had been imagination in it from the beginning. In Owen Evans, the first Welsh exemplar he produces, the predominating elements are pride and a kind of humourless poetry. Owen and his sister Megan, Johnny Geard's wife, are of the House of Rhys—that is, of the House of Dinefwr, the rulers of Deheubarth in southwest Wales³⁰—but Owen's dreary, introverted sadism is a version of the *persona* which John Cowper liked to put forward as his own. When, later, he moved on to the struggle of another chieftain, Owain Glyndwr, popularly elevated to prince, there were, of course, reasons for doing so which went beyond the personal. "I am fortunate here in Corwen", he writes,

to live in the very heart of the Owen Glendower country. In their passionate cult of Owen Glendower—who is as definitely the national hero as William Tell is of the Swiss, William the Silent of the Dutch, and Joan of Arc of the French—the deep-suppressed hero-worship of this race of mythologists finds its apotheosis. Glendower wanted to base his rule on the masses of the people, he wanted to give to Wales universities of her own, he wanted a Welsh Catholic Church free from alien interference, he was always enlisting on his side the bards, the sorcerers and the prophetic soothsayers; and whatever may be said of his methods of carrying on warfare, there was clearly something about the man, some mysterious indefinable quality, that embodied—as Shakespeare, who had what might almost be called a "mania" for the Welsh, clearly perceived—along with the strange magnetic fascination of this people, some occult power which exalted him even when it often betrayed him.³¹

Glyndwr was, it may be argued, a *given* subject. John Cowper had come to live in Glyndwr country. But it was also Powys, and Powys Fadog at that. There was, it would seem, a primary attraction to the figure of the prince, even in historical circumstances which really did not allow for the kind of prince John Cowper wished to portray. In the description of Glyndwr just quoted we may note the determination to draw out the aboriginal elements—the identification with the ordinary people, the

desire for a Church which was Welsh rather than Roman, the closeness to bards and soothsayers—and realise that what we are being asked to discern is the smudged portrait of *rex semi-mortuus*, the Concealed Head without which the realm could have neither peace nor joy. It is time now to set out briefly the story of the Head, without which much of what follows would remain unexplained.

Brân, or Bendigeidfran (Brân the Blessed), was the giant King of "the Island of the Mighty" depicted in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*.³² As he waded across the sea to Ireland to avenge his sister Branwen, he was seen by the alarmed Irish like a mountain moving alongside the ships which carried his men. Later, when his army had to cross the unbridgeable river Llinon, he laid his own body from bank to bank to enable his men to march over along it. "A fo ben bid bont", he said. "Let him who is a leader be a bridge"—an aphorism which at least one modern politician has seen fit to quote in recent years.³³ After many vicissitudes, Brân, with seven others (of whom his sister Branwen was one) escaped from the Ireland they had laid waste, but he had been wounded in the foot by a poisoned spear and gave instructions to his friends that one of them should behead him. The head, carried with them and carefully preserved, would ensure the forgetting of all sorrows to those who loved and survived him, so long as they obeyed his commands. At Gwales in Penfro³⁴ there was a great hall overlooking the sea.

And they went into the hall, and two doors they saw open; the third door was closed, that towards Cornwall. 'See yonder', said Manawydan, 'the door we must not open'. And notwithstanding all the sorrows they had seen before their eyes, and notwithstanding all that they had themselves suffered, there came to them no remembrance either of that or of any sorrow in the world. And there they passed the fourscore years so that they were not aware of having ever spent a time more joyous and delightful than that. It was not more irksome, nor could any tell of his fellow that he was older during that time, than when

they came there. Nor was it more irksome having the head with them then than when Bendigeidfran had been with them alive.³⁵

One of them, of course, had, in the end, to open the door towards Cornwall and the fullness of their sorrows came back. But when at length the head was buried under the White Mount in London, no plague could cross the sea to this Island so long as that concealment remained. This Brân was talismanic: where the Celts in their predatory, pre-Roman days on the Continent had set as weathercocks or preserved as drinking-vessels the skulls of their enemies in the belief that by so doing they continued to control the spirits of those dead foes, the Concealed Head represented the response of that cult to defeat. In the sad days what was needed was the control of *their own* spirits, the gradual easement towards acceptance and death. John Cowper, with his insistence on contemplating the sorrows of existence and his emphasis on the virtues of defeat, could not divest himself of this powerful vision.

For when he came to write again upon a Welsh subject, whom did he choose for his quiescent hero but Porius, the Dark Age prince of whom no more is known than the brief epitaph, 'Homo Christianus fuit', and whose caviosenargising inactivity allows him only one decisive action, the pursuit and rape of the Gawres. Why a prince again? Why not Myrddin Wyllt? Or the Derwydd? Or even Taliesin? All these were aspects or affinities of the Powys mind. The question cannot be answered except, perhaps, from the shape of John Cowper's 'life-illusion'. And possibly the particular activity allowed to Porius picks out part of the shape of the natural and philosophical problem John Cowper was seeking to resolve. In *Maiden Castle* Dud No-Man, buffeted by the Maiden Dun wind, mutters to himself:

... I *could* struggle . . . after the Secret . . . I *could* drop the entire world and live for the Spirit, as long as I was allowed my imaginative lusts!³⁶

It would not be unreasonable, in the terms of the Powysian opposites this paper has

been trying to identify, to translate this somewhat as follows: 'I could be an aboriginal and yield everything, but my lust needs power, even when it works only in the imagination. I must retain my *droit de seigneur*'. But this is nevertheless to limit the problem. The aboriginal needs power too, the power to bear defeat, the power to transform suffering, the power to survive. The prince had to be something more than the prince of lust: he had to be the invisible bridge, the concealed consoler. John Cowper, seeking the impossible consensus, had a role for his princely imaginings no less than for the evasions and propitiations that he justified in his own nature.

I turn now to *Maiden Castle*, to discover how far these seeming opposites persist. Let us look first at Dud No-Man, for in him and his purchase of Wizzie from the Circus we have a more modern analogy with Porius and the Gawres. Dud, we find, provides a large part, but not all, of the composite figure that John Cowper's view of the potential consensus demands, and this part, incomplete as it is, must nevertheless be labelled Welsh. With his club and "his awkward figure with its long arms, bony countenance and close-cropped skull" like that of "some necrophilistic Cerne Giant"³⁷ he appears an aboriginal: but in his imaginings he is "some reincarnated Bronze Age invader . . . selecting from among the girl-captives of the older Stone-Age the particular one that appealed to his erotic fancy" (81)—an image that recurs again and again as the narrative develops. This insistence on the Bronze Age creates a difficulty and some separation from Rhys: if this aspect of Dud is intended to be Celtic, as I am inclined to argue, a more strictly historical analogy would have portrayed an Iron Age invader picking out a Bronze Age girl-captive. Dud *could* be read simply as embodying John Cowper's contradictions within the aboriginal, so to speak—as the lust occasionally taking over from the evasion—but the word *invader* and Dud's later realisation of himself as "a double-dyed Welshman" (199) (for all that this arises from another strain in him) suggests the contrary.

When he and Wizzie are making their dilatory way after the others to Mai-Dun on Midsummer's Eve, he spends time trying to prove (again) that "they are like each other in so many ways" (349)—chiefly on the basis that they had both lost their mothers and had never seen their fathers (part of which Wizzie denies). This seems to me to be one of the several attempts in the book to unite the Celt with the aboriginal: it is also an echo in Dud of the orphan status of Enoch Quirm and his cousin Cornelia.

Maiden Castle, it is clear, is not to be the book of the Lineal Prince. If Dud No-Man is the embodiment of John Cowper's lusts and evasions, the would-be aboriginal who cannot quite get inside his rôle, Uryen is the ex-princely Consoling Power, the searcher after the Mystery which will make life as an aboriginal both possible and happy. This, I would suggest, makes *Maiden Castle* more sophisticated than *Owen Glendower*: it is the Book of the Imagination and Taliesin.

The combination of Dud and Uryen may be seen as disposing of all problems about the word *Welsh* in John Cowper's mind. But the reader is scarcely likely to understand their respective qualities as symbols until the end of the novel, if then. It was necessary, much earlier, for the author to work away, in terms more historical or pseudo-historical, at the identification of *aboriginal* with *Welsh*. Let us see how Enoch Quirm, now self-styled Uryen, pursues the equation.

Having revealed himself to Dud as his father, Uryen argues that Mai-Dun, on which they both stand, was a civilised *polis* long before the Romans came. "You must remember, lad", he says,

we're talking of the civilisation that built Stonehenge and Avebury. Why should the dwellers in Mai-Dun be regarded as wretched earth-burrowers, when their contemporaries could raise such monuments? (239)

Now it is inconceivable that John Cowper, erratic scholar as he sometimes was, could have imagined that the Celts had anything to do with the building of Stonehenge and Avebury, despite some niggles about the identity of the Beaker-Folk: Stonehenge,

even in its second or two-circle phase—the one which brought in the blue stones from Preseli—is thought to go back to 2100 B.C. or thereabouts and Avebury to at least a century earlier.³⁸ Maiden Castle is therefore plainly intended by J.C.P. to be seen as an aboriginal creation, but it is always spoken of throughout as *dun*, the fortress of the Celts. A little later Uryen declares that his name,

is no Celtic word but far older—a word belonging to that mysterious civilisation of the dwellers in Dunium and in the great cities about Avebury and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn and Caer Sidi and Cattræth and Carbonek, that was not Aryan at all, but a civilization possessed of secrets of life that Aryan science destroyed. (254)

It would take far too long and be far too difficult to tease out the relationships of all these names (Caer Drwyn, for example, is the name of the Iron Age fortress above Corwen): let me therefore concentrate on one—Cattræth—which is undeniably Celtic and late: the name is associated with the battle fought about 600 A.D. in which the three hundred horsemen of the Gododdin perished.³⁹ It is, as we shall see presently, the necessary link with the historical Urien and it is intended to support and justify both the name and the assertion that Enoch Quirm, the unrealised Uryen, was a Welshman.

The reconciliation between Celt and aboriginal is attempted again in a passage where Uryen describes himself to Dud as,

the Power that's older than all these new gods
... the Power that's got Death in it as well as
Life ...

which fact is,

the key to Uryen's country ... the land of
Rhedeg and Cattræth. (252)

Explanation for "the Power" and its nature must wait upon the full realisation of the Brân-Uryen identity: it must be sufficient here to reiterate that the Brân-figure is to be regarded, after Sir John Rhys, as aboriginal, if not Pictish, and that John Cowper here deliberately associates this figure with the

historically Celtic Rheged and Catteraeth. Uryen, we learn, has in him that,

old magic of the mind which, when driven to bay by the dogs of reality, turns upon the mathematical law of life and tears it to bits . . . the magic which the Welsh, alone among the races, hid . . . instead of squandering. (252)

There it is! There is the clincher! It is from the aboriginal majority who survived, not merely in Wales but in western Britain, that the Welsh have acquired those peaceable mysteries and what Ernest Renan called "the invincible need for illusion".⁴⁰ They are not the authors of their virtues, but they are certainly the *keepers*.

It is time now to look more closely at the name Uryen and at Enoch Quirm who either chose it or had it posted to him out of antiquity. That he is the Consoling Power while he flourishes we must assume now and prove later. But that he is physically Brân we can surely recognise very quickly. On his first appearance he is described (55) as swarthy of feature and majestic of head—"brow, nose, mouth, chin, all . . . modelled on a scale of abnormal massiveness" but with eyes that are "dull, lifeless, colourless, opaque", as though he wears "a great antique mask with empty eye-sockets" into which someone had fitted glass marbles. His hair is black, growing in small, stiff curls—Dud, on another occasion (162), thinks it looks like moss—and several of the other characters, at different times, opine that he is about sixty years of age. His first function in the narrative is as a master of drugs, which he mixes in order to recover the heart of his wife Nance—a very clear symbol of the kind of Power he is: he washes himself by putting his head over and over again into a basin of water while he says his prayers—"I don't know *what* prayers, I'm sure", says Nance (275)—and his general appearance is that of "a half-vitalized corpse" (55). As seen by Dud in the light of the lantern in the barn, he has "a skin full of blotches and creases . . . a monstrous and sodden face" (171). The wearer ordinarily of old and smelly clothes and given to slouching as he walks, he can on occasion—as at Cumber's party—smarten

up, lose that semi-mortuary look, and let his face subside from the majestic into the handsome (221-22). A great seducer of women in his youth, though not in the time of Dud and *Maiden Castle*, he has a final distinguishing mark (which Dud is obliged, unwillingly, to feel)—the scar on his very hairy chest which he says is the raven or crow—*brân* in Welsh—he has had since he was a child, a scar which, when in proximity to someone in mental pain, hurts "like a fiery beak pecking at me" and yet is "sweet as an ecstasy" (253).

The reader's first reaction to this *brân*-mark may be that it seems a very crude way of establishing a dual identity. Why, in any case, bother to call Enoch Quirm Uryen rather than Brân? Solely for reasons of euphony? These questions cannot be answered except by tackling head-on a declaration which at first sight is even more confusing. For Quirm alleges that,

King Pellam, and Urban of the Black Thorn, and Yspadadden the father of Olwen and Uther Ben the father of Arthur are really, every one of them, just local names for the 'Uryen' in me, as I was incarnated down the ages. (254)

This is not a direct quotation from Sir John Rhys, whom Quirm quotes as his authority. Nor is it even a summary of his views that a modern reader could accept. But there is no question that the source material for the statement John Cowper puts into the mouth of Enoch Quirm is to be found in Rhys's *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1891) and in particular in that chapter entitled 'Urien and his Congeners'.⁴¹ This is the source, too, for the reference to Urien made by Owen Evans in *A Glastonbury Romance* as he works himself up after the news of Young Tewsy's catch of "the girt chub of Lydford Mill", declaring that Glastonbury,

has always been set apart . . . from the earliest times . . . Urien the Mysterious, Avallach the Unknown, were Fisher-Kings here . . . and for what did they fish?⁴²

Before this or any other question about Urien can be answered it is absolutely neces-

sary, I think, that he should be realised as a legendary and historical character.

In Malory, Books I and II, he appears as King "Uryens of Gore"⁴³ or "Goore"⁴⁴—one of the eleven kings led by Lot of Lothian and Orkney who refuse to accept the beardless boy Arthur as their over-king. Apparently one of the senior, or less personally active, kings on the battle-field—he is not one of the kings in the narrative several times unhorsed and rehorsed⁴⁵—he is nevertheless central to the conspiracy: when the eleven kings are at length discomfited they retire "unto a cité that hyght Surhaute, which cité was within kynge Uriens londe".⁴⁶ Later, after a further encounter between Arthur and the rebels, King Uryens, accompanied by his wife Morgan le Fay, Arthur's half-sister, attends the funeral of King Lot, struck down by King Pellynore.⁴⁷ Morgan le Fay, however, has a lover called Accolon whose welfare she sets before that of either Uryens or Arthur.⁴⁸ Uryens, besides being cuckolded, has the air in Malory of a character of secondary importance: he is usually introduced as the father of the much more renowned Uwayne and in age he must be at least ten years older than Arthur and possibly a great deal more.

This portrait of him, of course, is part of the enormous fiction that the French, in particular, had developed from the vaguely historical beginnings available in Welsh or in the Latin of Nennius. Nevertheless, his designation as king of Gore led antiquarians and early historians, Sir John Rhys equivocally among them, to identify him with Gower, with the possibility that Surhaute might even be in the Scilly Isles.⁴⁹ In the work of modern historians the picture is quite different. There is no question now that Urien's *real* kingdom of Rheged stretched from what we would call southern Scotland as far south and east as Catterick in north Yorkshire, the Cattræth already referred to. With his court at Carlisle, he was one of the most successful kings of the invasion period—that is, he is thought to have been at the peak of his power some forty years or more *after* the death of

Arthur at Camlann in 537 A.D. or thereabouts. So successful was he that he was besieging the Angle invaders in their last stronghold on Ynys Medgawdd, the Isle of Lindisfarne, when he was assassinated by an agent of Morcant or Morgan, a rival of his amongst the Brythonic kings.

This historical placing, all the same, is not without its difficulties. In 573 A.D. there was fought a battle or so north of Longtown, itself not much above a dozen miles from Carlisle, the battle of Arfderydd. The combatants on the one side were apparently Peredur of York and his brother Gwrgi, Dunawd the Stout and Cynfelyn the Leprous, and on the other Gwenddolau mab Ceidio, one of the princes of the Selgovae, who ruled the region surrounding the confluence of the rivers Esk and Liddel.⁵⁰ This battle has been represented recently as one between the Christian forces of northern Britain and a tribe, still pagan, which had for shaman, witch-doctor and prophet none other than Merlin.⁵¹ When Gwenddolau was killed and Merlin became a fugitive in the woods, the latter's fear, often repeated in his verse, was of Rhydderch Hael, King of Strathclyde, who had established his Christian bishop Kentigern at Glasgow.⁵² Rhydderch may or may not have taken part in the battle, but he certainly exercised suzerainty over Coed Celyddon, the region in which rise the rivers Annan, Clyde and Tweed. Where, in all this, was Urien? Why did he not take part in a battle so close to, and perhaps within, his frontier? Or if he was already dead, where was his son Owain, king of Rheged in his place? Urien was described by Taliesin as Urien Yrechwydd,

. . . the chieftain, the paramount ruler,
the far-flung refuge, first of fighters found.⁵³

Yet it may be necessary to conclude that his territory was restricted northwards, perhaps to a strip along the north shore of the Solway Firth—the territory of the Novantæ—a situation very different from that granted to him by mythology and the references of other poets.

There are nine *awdlau* to Urien or his son Owain which modern scholars are prepared

to accept as written by a contemporary Taliesin. In *The Book of Taliesin*, however, in which these *awdlau* are found, there is a much larger number of poems, religious, prophetic and legendary, formerly attributed to Taliesin, which can now be seen as considerably later in date. It is from this material that some of the mythological narratives appertaining to Urien are derived. The poems written in Urien's lifetime and shortly after it, however, are devoted solely to the themes expected—the king's generosity at court, particularly to his bards, and his ferocity on the battlefield. On the face of it, the historical Urien seems a less than satisfactory choice for J.C.P.'s purposes. Although reputedly a just ruler and a generous patron, he lived amongst the overtones of warfare. It could be said of him that he was "the Power that's got Death in it as well as Life", if one is prepared to misunderstand that pronouncement, but hardly that he was "a great death-lover"⁵⁴ like Broch o Meifod, the Brân-figure of *Owen Glendower*. He is, moreover, a lineal prince, and *Maiden Castle* is not devised as the book of the lineal prince. Urien, however, becomes Brân, as we have seen, and the prince is a prince of the imagination. One of the usefulnesses of the name, questions of euphony apart, is that it enables John Cowper to bring in enough history to scatter indubitably Celtic names like Rheged and Cattræth over a background that is intendedly aboriginal. In this way the adjective *Welsh* can contain both its Powysian meanings.

The significance of Urien in *Maiden Castle*, however, lies chiefly in mythology and Sir John Rhys. Let us return to the Brânmark, which on the breast of a resurrected god named Uryen still has a slight air of the ridiculous. But one of the Taliesin poems does indicate that the historical Urien was so marked. From this Sir John Rhys argues, rather less than convincingly, that the Brân-Urien identification goes much further.⁵⁵ Drawing on the murder of Urien by Llouan Llawdivro, otherwise unknown (and why should he not be?), and linking this with references to the return of Urien's head to

Rheged by sorrowing companions, he postulates from these and a likeness between the colour of Urien and that of Uthr Ben (black or dusky) a divinity called The Wonderful Head, of which Brân and Urien are seen as aspects. King Pellam gets into the argument because of the Triad of the Three Dolorous Strokes,⁵⁶ but the reasoning behind the inclusion appears faulty: Pellam's land lay waste after Balyn's stroke, but Brân's did not and there is no evidence that Urien's did either. Dolorous Strokes may be collected in threes but not thereby made identical in effect. With Urban of the Black Thorn the argument goes farther afield still. Rhys's point is that all the characters named, together with Yspaddaden the father of Olwen, are in his view aspects of a dark or sable divinity, amongst which that of Brân, unmentioned in Irish mythology, may be seen as the most junior. Urien, on the other hand, as lord of *yr Echwyd* (the Evening) is the oldest and loftiest.

John Cowper makes full use of this conclusion. He is not greatly concerned with the detail of Rhys's argument. Nor does he celebrate the Urien whom poems in *The Book of Taliesin* call "the Gold-King of the North" and ruler of Moray, that is, Alban from Loch Lomond (with its sixty islands) to Caithness, even though the geography of this offers a strong Pictish identification.⁵⁷ What he chooses to emphasise is the Urien of *yr Echwyd*, whose function is encapsulated in a gnomic stanza from the same Book (252), in the translation of which he displaces the translation of "supreme gwledig" (or chieftain), offered by Skene and Rhys, in favour of the much more elastic "supreme power", and substitutes for "principal pilgrim" (Skene) and "pristine companion" (Rhys) the greater immediacy of "principal companion".⁵⁸ The effect of these changes is to present Urien as the traveller who has passed first into the evening and stands there to welcome and assist those who in their turn come to his shadowland and abide amongst the dead. It also enables the Uryen of *Maiden Castle* to claim with justification that he is "the power that's *older* than all these new gods . . . the

Power that's got Death in it as well as Life" (252). One cannot help feeling, however, that it is from Brân rather than Urien that John Cowper's Consoling Power takes his force when he has his Uryen cry out about "the *necessity*" he is under "of bearing the pain of the world, the pain of what beats against the wall" (251). And the definition of the pain—sterile love which turns to hate—owes little to any mythology save that of John Cowper. The need to "break through" to the *secret*, however, can be interpreted in two ways: it is possible to think that Uryen, because he is Lord of *Yr Echwyd* only in the strength of his imagination (a point which will be developed later), has not achieved the full ability to Console: much more likely it is that John Cowper is merely echoing the limitations of pagan philosophy in recognising that the *mental pain* of living is dulled rather than removed by the Brân/Urien divinity and that the *secret* of living happily and painlessly remains undiscovered in the empyrean.

Analysis of the origins of the Uryen of *Maiden Castle* does not, of course, answer all the questions, and it is apparent that this curious re-incarnation has been shaped by J.C.P. with some freedom. It may be of interest, however—if unquestionably digressive in terms of literary criticism—that there is another and quite unmythological explanation possible of the *brân*-mark on Urien's chest. In 'The Dream of Rhonabwy', a late and obscurely ironic story included amongst the *Mabinogi*, a quarrel breaks out between the squires and men-at-arms who owe allegiance to Arthur and the *ravens* of Owain of Rheged.⁵⁹ Owain and Arthur are ostensibly engaged in a campaign together against the Saxons, but in the story they are entirely inactive, sitting not far from the Severn and playing *gwyddbwyll*, each in turn ignoring the messages brought to him and refusing to call his followers off. The author of this narrative makes it quite plain that the ravens are birds—when Owain gives the order to counter-attack they "let wind into their wings" and, after their success, "there was a great commotion in

the air, what with the fluttering of the exultant ravens and their croaking"⁶⁰—but this may be due either to the irony of the presenter or to an ignorance caused by the late date of the story's composition.⁶¹ It appears very possible that the soldiers of Rheged were nicknamed *ravens* because they bore raven badges on their breasts, and the author of 'The Dream of Rhonabwy', if indeed he did not know this, is no more ridiculous in making his description of them literal than have been the many historians of comparatively modern days who made a meal of the entry in the *Easter Annals* which reads:

Bellum badonis in quo arthur portavit crucem domini nostri jesu christi tribus diebus & tribus noctibus in humeros suos.⁶²

In this case, as in that of the ravens, the explanation lies not in miracle or myth, but in the badge or *insignium*. At the end of the tale of 'The Lady of the Fountain',⁶³ whose hero is Owain of Rheged, this Owain ceases to be captain of Arthur's war-band and goes,

to his own possessions. Those were the Three Hundred Swords of Cenferchyn and the Flight of Ravens. And wherever Owain went, and they with him, he would be victorious.

The Ravens, in other words, were Owain's war-band. Guy Ragland Phillips, in his diffuse but highly stimulating *Brigantia* (1976), points to the existence of some fifteen Raven names—from Raven Seat Moor on the north side of upper Swaledale to Raven's Barrow on Cartmel Fell, Raven Crag overlooking Eskdale and Ravenstone on the shore of Bassenthwaite Lake—which "form something that looks remarkably as if it might be a boundary line of Rheged".⁶⁴ In other words, the Raven-places would have been military posts or look-out stations and the Rheged enclosed, though small in terms of many of the claims made for it, might have approximated to the Kingdom of the later and more embattled days. Not a single *raven*-name occurs *within* the circle described, "a coincidence", as Phillips puts it, "which it is not possible to ignore".⁶⁵

Another and late reference⁶⁶ tells us that Owain received his warrior-birds from his grandfather Cynfarch Oer (Cynfarch the Cold) and that Urien his father never possessed or led them. This, however, is probably an illustration of the tendency of later generations to credit their heroes—of whom Owain, like Arthur, was one—with friends, contemporaries and possessions, not to mention stories, that were not, and often could not have been, strictly theirs. Urien, I think, bore his raven badge just as his son did.

This historical excursion has now exhausted whatever excuse it may have had. I must return to *Maiden Castle* and attempt to explain what John Cowper intends the reader to learn from his *rex semi-mortuus*, his Uryen disguised as Brân. And how in particular does this resurrected divinity exemplify Wales?

There are four points to make, I think, which I shall take in reverse order of importance to the theme. The first is Uryen's sympathy for women (though there are hints of wife-beatings which Nance suppresses). That this sympathy takes in lesbianism is obvious. Uryen seems to Dud to be suppressing "a mighty glow of triumphant exultation" (165) when Thuella fondles and kisses Wizzie: he assumes indeed "an expression like that of some grandly modelled imperturbable idol—an expression of terrifying complacency". When the two girls are together again on Midsummer's Eve on the summit of Mai-Dun, Uryen, who has to go off to the excavations with Claudius and Teucer Wye, exchanges a look with Wizzie which seems to mean approval of their proximity: it says, "Don't worry about me. We understand each other perfectly" (359-60). Wizzie, meanwhile, under the impression that he is as consumed with love for her as she is for him, finally gets to sit on his lap, but after he has "touched with his forefinger the tip of her left breast . . . a gesture the extreme opposite of a sensual one" (446) he makes it plain, in his broken-down state, to both Wizzie and Thuella that he has tried to use the latter's love for Wizzie "to break through into the Mystery that

maddens" (466) him. It is the spirit of 'Carridwen', as Dud would have explained it. Any kind of love is love. And can be used to break through to whatever is at the universe's heart. I think this aspect of the novel reflects more than John Cowper's gloss on the spirit of his modern Welsh aboriginals—"A communistic matriarchy is our secret ideal of human life":⁶⁷ behind it is his knowledge of the women's rights written into the laws of Hywel Dda (each woman to have her *sarhad* and her testimony to be accepted in sexual matters against that of the man, if both are unsupported'⁶⁸ and behind them again the rich tombs at Vix and Villeneuve-Renneville, evidences that the aboriginals of the sixth and fifth century B.C. in the valleys of the Rhone, the Seine and the Marne had turned their Celtic overlords towards the veneration of women.⁶⁹

My second point is less clearly evoked in *Maiden Castle* than I could wish, although in one respect the narrative depends upon it for its climax. Uryen is the master of secrets and, what is more, Druidical secrets. Owen Evans prepares the ground for this when he challenges John Crow at Stonehenge:

'It's very English,' said John.

The man turned and gave him a strange indignant glance.

'Is it English then to hide your great secret?' he cried excitedly.

'Is it English to keep your secret to the very end?''⁷⁰

His demeanour, John thought, was that of "a mad dissenting minister"⁷¹—a nice touch which brings the Druidical down through the ages to the *Parch*-dominated Eisteddfod of John Cowper's day. But the Druidical element—the patriotism, the divination, the hieratic wisdom, the human sacrifice, together with that insistence on learning everything by rote, writing nothing down and revealing nothing to those not within the secret, first commented on by Julius Caesar⁷²—is thinly represented in *Maiden Castle*. In the strict sense it occurs only in one throwaway paragraph. Uryen mentions an unearthly smell coming at some seasons from Mai-Dun: "I think," he says,

'... they must have burnt some special kind of wood there in old days. It isn't the smell of burning flesh; but I've smelt that smell more than once, and this is quite different.' (227)

Unrealistically, no one makes any further enquiry or comment.

In the matter of secrets Uryen is prepared to discuss with the other assembled characters the 'three-horned' bull already excavated from Mai-Dun, but this is in pseudo-scientific fashion, which he probably equates with disguise. He reveals the full basis of his ideas to his newly-recognised son Dud, plainly with the intention of drawing him into the secret but with no prohibition about passing it on: and he has certainly explained himself, if perhaps only in part, to Thuella, who protests to Wizzie:

'It's Uryen's *ideas* that fascinate me. I can't bear the smelly clothes'. (362)

Yet the writing about those same ideas for Cumber's newspaper (one of the less well-handled parts of the book, this) ultimately destroys him. Wizzie thinks it is the money that does for him:

'Wherever money enters it kills life! , , , and when you started writing those articles for Cumber you blew your soul away like a dandelion-seed . . . You gave him your ideas —one by one for his money.' (372)

But it is not the money. Uryen himself, *in extremis*, explains:

'When I kept my secret here'—and again he struck himself on the chest—'where I've had it written from my birth . . . I was strong in my faith. When I told my son I was strong in my faith. But when I wrote of it for the world the virtue went out of me!' (369)

But he goes on to blame them all, his son included. Not one of them has the *Hiraeth* for the Secret. Which means, in the terms of the novel, that he has no witness to pronounce on and for him.

Dud agreed with Nance that by publishing his life-illusion he had 'killed his heart'. (482)

But this is a verdict from those who have either not fully accepted the Secret or have not been told it. In not providing another

grasper at the Secret, John Cowper has tilted the balance of the novel towards disbelief. In a modern society pagan dreams wither and die.

With the third point we discover the main-spring of the theme. *Maiden Castle* is the book of the image and the imagination. It is not the book of the lineal prince but that of the orphan brought up by an aunt at the lodge-gates of the park once possessed by his ancestors. That does not prevent Enoch from being *gŵr bonheddig* in the Welsh manner, but the park is the first image of the Secret, something he sees but does not possess.

Not by willing a thing but by imagining a thing does the thing come true,

declares John Cowper in "My Philosophy",⁷³ and it is at the level of imagination that Uryen-who-was-Enoch lives much of his life. There is some of the child in it: when he sees three-year-old Lovie with her paper Gwendolly he knows at once that Lovie and Gwendolly are going to see the Queen. Lovie, without bothering herself *how* he knows, recognises that,

here was someone who treated existence exactly as she did, that is to say, who regarded *what you were pretending* as the only real reality in your life. (319)

It is the extent and depth of Uryen's imagination that separates him even from Dud, who is some way ahead of the others in openness to his world.

'No, my lad, my gods aren't as real as your stick, or as the mole on your belly that your mother used to tell me about', (234)

argues Uryen, insisting that the control lies with him.

'I might believe absolutely in my gods and *yet* refuse to sacrifice anything to them . . . they'd have their own *kind* of reality—all that gods *can* have, or *ever do* have, or *ever will* have . . . They don't need your damned all-or-nothing truths'. (234-35)

As he becomes more excited, he opens his heart to Dud.

'Fumbling about in the roots of the past I found what I was, what I *must* be, to be the thing I am! Everything's in the mind. Everything's created and destroyed by the mind . . . You think it's madness to talk of the old gods of Mai-Dun? You think I ought to be interested in their excavations, and their proofs that human beings lived in this place like hyenas in holes among bones . . . I tell you *we*, I and others like me, are the gods of Mai-Dun—the same yesterday, today and forever . . . Don't you feel this whole great fortress ready to shake, shiver, melt, dissolve? Don't you feel that you and I are behind it, making it what it is by the power of our minds?' (250)

It is important, I think, to recognise the part played in this pagan imagination by the image, Christian and Welsh as it may be (John Cowper thinks "the Cymric nation . . . by far the most purely Christian nation in the world").⁷⁴ The two hieratic bed-posts are "ancestral"—that is, they belong to the family of which Enoch and his cousin Cornie were members in Wales: Enoch stole one from Cornie's bed when they quarrelled. The one which remained with "the woman from Wales" (17) was passed on to her son Dud who, while not understanding what physical form or forms the head on it represents, has come to realise that it stands for *desire*—that *hiraeth* that Uryen cries out about when near his death, the desire to penetrate the mystery of the cosmos. Cornie in her lifetime showed no wish or intention to return to Wales but worked on one of her woollen covers, possessed by Dud, a picture of a stately manorial gate flanked by *two* hieratic heads like the one she still possessed. This is the second image—the imagination separated from its source but still powerful and intact. And Uryen, when still strong in his power, can afford to return his stolen head to Dud to make a pair again for him, doubtless in hope that his son too, provided as he was provided, will be moved to the *hiraeth*. Dud, however, having got as far with his single head as to identify it with Malory's *Questing Beast*, to be identified further, perhaps, from his reading of Rhys, with Taliesin's *Dor-Marth*, the Door of Death (114-15), cannot—or will not—

follow Uryen through it to possess "the power that's got Death in it as well as Life" (252). But that power is not to last in Uryen. When, much later, publication of the Secret has killed it, Uryen is urgent to get back the head he relinquished, and, on receiving it, hugs and slobbers over it in the hope that it can still be the means to the Secret's renewal.

'It—He—I always had some creature that was the body of our longing, of our *hiraeth*, of our desire, the incarnation of our power to break through . . .' (449)

he tries to explain. But the image no longer works.

John Cowper, however, is not content with this outline. He provides a philosophical commentary on the significance of the image. Claudius expounds the idea of *progress*, the identification of the image as the past:

'Evolution means Scientific Excavation at one end and Scientific Experiment at the other. The more you know about what *was*, the faster you can create what *will be*'. (126)

To Uryen scientific research into what he calls "the Power of the Abyss" is "the Devil's joke" (448). Teucer Wye, on the other hand, is given leave to outline the Platonic position:

' . . . the soul feeds on invisible, not visible things! The soul is a wayfarer *through* matter only to learn the trick of shaking matter off! Of course matter affords symbols of the soul, and of the soul's journey from one level of spiritual beauty to another, but there's nothing divine in matter, *except the Divine!* The symbols that matter casts up are like the bubbles cast up to the surface of a stream when a glittering fish passes by. It's because of the passage of the soul through its inert resistance that matter produces symbols at all! (367) . . . These precious discoveries must not bind us to earth'. (374)

Uryen, however, in his only studio exposition, refutes both the scientific and the Platonic position as he speaks of the 'three-horned' bull dug up on Mai-Dun, which has two human torsos impaled on its horns and another on its up-curving tail. "It is one of those things", he says, addressing Thuella,

'that go deeper into life than anything in your Dad's Plato . . . It's not classical symbolism anyway, it goes back further; and when you talk of science you must remember that these things are like dark-finned fish embedded in ice. *They have life in them that can be revived.* And I must say this to you, Mr. Cask: it is *not* science that can revive them . . . Besides, the secret escapes you! What you and your kind call Evolution I call Creation'. (167)

Even to Dud, Maiden Castle, "this Titanic erection of the demented mould-warp man . . . this mystical city of Dunium" (230), takes on monstrous forms. Creation . . . Re-Creation . . . Imagination: for J.C.P., as for Uryen, they are bound up together. He would argue, though he does not say so precisely, that this approach to life is Welsh/aboriginal because it is "ancestral", handed down, present in the consciousness of individuals if not wholly so in the community, and because "the very essence of the Welsh spirit" is to seek "an escape by feeling rather than a conviction by understanding".⁷⁵ That is, he has an *Annwn* to retire into, a hedge of mist to keep the heart secure, an *echwyd* to look upon in prospect, whenever "the rubble of objective truth"⁷⁶ falls too heavily on his consciousness. The danger over, he emerges again to re-shape his existence in accordance with the continuum of imagination.

The fourth and most important point of all is simpler to expound. Uryen is the heir to Taliesin. Now Taliesin, historically, was a late sixth century poet of 'the old North' and, as we have seen, the writer of a number of eulogies to the historical Urien, King of Rheged. An early eulogy to Cynan Garwyn, however, has persuaded some modern scholars that he (Taliesin) was a native of Powys and unquestionably John Cowper felt him and saw him on that ancestral ground. He reveals that after he came to live at Corwen he used to go, early in the morning and on an empty stomach, to pray at "a lichen-covered rock which has come to represent for me the great spirit of the mysterious Poet Taliesin".⁷⁷ It was not, however, the eulogies of the historical Taliesin that John Cowper found use for. There

is, in the later folk-tale known as Hanes Taliesin, believed to belong to the ninth or tenth century, much more imaginative material. It is the tale of the servant-boy on whom the drops from Ceridwen's cauldron fell and blessed him with the gift of poetry. Pursued by the furious Ceridwen through a number of shape-changes and finally re-born from her own womb, the boy is found by Elffin ap Gwyddno Garanhir in his weir-net, renamed Taliesin and ultimately taken to the court of Maelgwn Gwynedd, where he silences the court poets by his magical powers. Summoned by the king to speak, he answers in verse. I quote a few lines from the translation of Lady Charlotte Guest, the one that perhaps John Cowper first read:

I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,
On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell:
I have borne a banner before Alexander;
I know the names of the stars from north to
south;
I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the
Distributor;
I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain;
I conveyed the Divine Spirit to the level of the
vale of Hebron;
I was in the court of Don before the birth of
Gwdion.
I was instructor to Eli and Enoc; . . .
I was at the place of the crucifixion of the
merciful Son of God;
I have been three periods in the prison of
Arianrod;
I have been the chief director of the work of
the tower of Nimrod;
I am a wonder whose origin is not known.

I have been in Asia with Noah in the ark,
I have seen the destruction of Sodom and
Gomorrah;
I have been in India when Roma was built,
I am now come here to the remnant of
Troia.⁷⁸

One may comment, digressively, that the last lines quoted must date this poem later than 1136, but no matter: John Cowper, like David Jones and Vernon Watkins among Anglo-Welsh poets, was fascinated by this vision of the spirit reincarnated in every age, disappearing like Owain Glyndwr, Owain

Lawgoch and the other Welsh leaders whom the bards remember, but disappearing only to re-appear, in time, in political or military victory. This is, of course, a *Welsh*, and therefore more aggressive, version of J.C.P.'s concept of the aboriginals who *could afford to wait*, but marrying the two presented no great difficulty. The choice of the name Enoch was a beginning: for Enoch

walked with God: and he *was* not; for God took him.⁷⁹

When Enoch has long been Uryen he tells Dud:

'Now do you begin to see the truth about my name? I didn't change it to Uryen because Uryen's a prettier sound than Enoch, but because I found, in incarnation after incarnation, that I've actually *been* Uryen'. (252)

It is to this aspect of Uryen's mystery that Dud is most resistant, especially when Uryen claims that, "a whole cycle of ancient gods . . . connected . . . with the worship of the great goddess Carridwen" continually re-incarnate themselves (247). But when Dud, still turning over in his mind the extraordinary nature of his sonship, has laid his finger unwillingly on "the seal of Uryen" (255), he turns away into the wind which has mysteriously got up, hears his companion muttering something which he thinks is "probably Taliesin's chant to the wind" (257) and says to himself:

This old Welsh must be the most primitive of all tongues. It sounds as if human inventions, human necessities, human thought, barely entered into it; as if its rhythm were identical with the orchestration of the planet, whose only notes are the motions of air and water and its only burden the ancient sorrow of the earth. What he's muttering now must be what the spirits of space must have heard, rising night by night, day by day, through millions of ages, from an earth that as yet knew no organic life. (257)

It is not unreasonable, I think, to see in this tribute to the ancientness of the Welsh language an attempt, not merely to carry it back beyond the aboriginals but, in terms of that part of the novel's thesis which apper-

tains to Wales, to wrap it around the aboriginal core and to suggest that its speakers are more than *keepers* of aboriginal secrets. It may also imply, however unhistorically, that the language, as it emerged in Taliesin's day, embodies the modifications of the aboriginals, that, in a word, the propitiations and the world sadnesses of those who have been here from the beginning sound through.

There, then, is the Welsh motif of *Maiden Castle*, the book of the Imagination and Taliesin. It presents, in my view, the most consistent and unified vision of one aspect of Welsh tradition in any of the works of John Cowper Powys. The extent to which this has not been understood is remarkable: to the writer of a recent article on the novel which is very perceptive about the feminine aspects of the narrative Uryen is no more than Nance's "mad, smelly husband".⁸⁰ The Editor of *The Powys Review* remarks that the "atmosphere . . . to some readers is often clammily morbid"⁸¹ and Richard Perceval Graves finds "the sinister tone of *Maiden Castle* . . . an unpleasant shock after the magical healing of the Grail in *A Glastonbury Romance* and the nostalgic enchantment of *Weymouth Sands*".⁸² What we are hearing here, I think, is the response to John Cowper's 'mortuary' trappings for a resurrected god, not to the ideas expressed. It is not true, for example, that Uryen tries to "break through" by "exploiting the impotent love of people close to him"⁸³ unless lesbian love is automatically to be regarded as impotent. Due notice should be taken, despite his erratic literary judgments,⁸⁴ of John Cowper's own declaration, while he was still writing it, that his "Dorchester book" is "a book far more deeply and obstinately and indurately made up of me wone antick notions and chin-digging obstinacies . . . than any other",⁸⁵ despite his admission that he has, so to speak, been beaten back into this position by his experience of litigation.⁸⁶ One view of *Maiden Castle*, moreover, might take in a happy ending for all its major characters except the dead Uryen and the deserted Dud:

Thuella and Wizzie are away to America, 'doing their own thing' (however improbably painting and a life in the circus may concur): Jenny and Claudius have entered the realm of physical conjunction and have Lovie to look after: Teucer Wye has come to live with the daughter he favours: only Dud is desolate, and even he has the passion of Nance in the offing. The ending, indeed, has some resemblance to the plan for *Autobiography* John Cowper wrote of to his "darling Lulu":

The only Villain of the curious fairytale will be John his wone self.⁸⁷

But I digress again. How does all this relate to the view I presented in "The Sacrificial Prince"? Not at all simply, I have to answer. If that previous view was right at all (which is highly doubtful) it was so for the wrong reasons.

In the first place, John Cowper himself denies it. In Wales, he says,

Not a field, not a hill, not a river-bank, but there emanate from it, wavering, fluctuating, ebbing and flowing like mountain-rain, legends and rumours of an unbelievably remote past.⁸⁸

The first thing he noticed on coming from Dorset, he continues, was,

the almost complete obliteration here of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the curious emergence of twentieth century life out of a remoter and more romantic past.⁸⁹

At King Eliseg's Pillar at Valle Crucis he felt the spirit of the remote past more powerfully than even at Glastonbury.⁹⁰ Where, then, are the 'emanations' in *Owen Glendower* and why do they die away?

It may not be necessary to take John Cowper's assertions at face-value, for to have delivered himself otherwise would have denied his "life-illusion", but there are answers more important than any sophistry of his. We have seen how living at Corwen directed his attention to Owain Glyndwr: we see now, in his reference to the disappearance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the pressure he felt on him to take

an ancient or medieval subject for his next novel. We should note also his observation of "the non-existence of the social class which of all others gives the dominant note to life in the south-west of England", namely, "the upper-middle class".⁹¹ For this was the class in which his personal experience of life lay, the class about which he had most consistently written. It was asking a lot of him to enter a new society and shape Corwen shopkeepers and estate workmen into the modern *aboriginals* he theorised about. That society, moreover, was largely Welsh-speaking, and John Cowper, despite his book-Welsh, seems to have been relatively incapable in conversation and little disposed to try. Most of what he learned about his neighbours came from his far more outgoing companion Phyllis. The obvious solution beckoned—to take a historical subject. All the pressures were towards Glyndwr.

Glyndwr, nevertheless, was a mistake. Some of the reasons for this judgment are relatively minor. A great deal of historical research was needed: John Cowper's reading was widened from the mythological into the historical. His earliest extant letter to Iorwerth Peate, dated 13 October 1937, gives us a tiny insight into the new areas he had to be concerned with:

I am not *over* worried by finding that the Mabinogion is still our best authority on costumes for I shall be spared further research & moreover . . . shall be free to use my imagination to the limit! . . . I must work hard at Owain.⁹²

By 22 November 1938, he had reached page 900—"in my own handwriting . . . which is very large as thou seest".⁹³ He was determined to reach 2000 pages and in the end produced 356,865 words or thereabouts, "a little bit shorter than Glastonbury".⁹⁴

How is this relevant? In two ways, I think. First, the new reading bulks large: history pushes out mythology and emanations. The writing is full of new doctrine and ideas: Walter Brut the Lollard, Iolo Goch, Mad Huw, Crach Ffynnant, Pascentius and many more—if they do not have their say, and

most of them do, then their positions are described. Second, because John Cowper was escaping into history and felt 'safe' from misrepresentation and litigation, his writing is self-indulgent and inconsequential: a number of the minor characters are there, it would seem, to indulge their author's sexual fantasies. Gone is the stricter, self-imposed framework of *Maiden Castle*: within a historical plan of time and action which J.C.P. obviously thought of as *given*, as providing the framework *for* him, he could fit in very much what he liked. The brilliance of the writing has its effect from time to time, but its purpose is fragmented.

More serious still, as my essay "The Sacrificial Prince" tries to point out, is his failure to move his mythology away from the Brân-image. There he is, apparently trying to describe a revolt that, with incredible unity and loyalty, lasted at least thirteen years, positing a de-activated prince who, by mental exteriorisation, sheer inattention or unrecorded evasion, gives no lead, takes no decisions that are not re-active and momentarily violent, and is subject at times to irrelevant and inexplicable sexual fantasies. Physically Owen is not Brân: he is indeed, "that great Normanized Celt for whom we Aborigines shed so much blood":⁹⁵ he is jewelled and golden, as the Romans described the continental Celts to be. But his behaviour is aboriginal: how he contrives to be in rebellion at all is a mystery. Brân makes a separate entry, momentarily, as a legend, wading up through the tide at Harlech, "carrying on his back the ghosts of half-a-dozen bards".⁹⁶ But the real Brân-figure is Broch o Meifod, whose wife Morg ferch Lug, despite the Celticised form of her name, is disclosed to be an aboriginal. Broch's advice it is that is absolutely necessary to the success of the rebellion, but no meaningful dialogue with Owen appears. Owen, having the spirit of Brân without the flesh, has nothing to learn from Broch, for whom there is no sufficient role. They are altogether too close to each other. Neither of them, together or apart, could, on their behaviour revealed, have kept any working loyalty going for thirteen years.

John Cowper had, in *Owen Glendower*, run out of mythology and the old Brân theme did not serve. Or, to put it another and more penetrating way, his abiding interest was in his aboriginal theory of living and he had found nothing else in Welsh mythology to serve his purpose. If the Wales he depicts there lacks the texture and feeling of the Dorset he knew so well, it is because he was still a newcomer to the valley of the Dee, because, despite an initial attention to Dinas Brân, the action of the narrative moves to a number of sites rather than the single one of *Maiden Castle*, because much of his time is spent conceptualising characters and ideas that are English or international rather than Welsh, and because, his intellectual grasp notwithstanding, he chooses to ignore the heart and spirit of early fifteenth century Wales in favour of a deep-rooted theory of his own.⁹⁷ Owain Glyndwr may have seemed to John Cowper inevitable as a subject, but he was nonetheless a mistake. With whatever brilliance, history is not to be trifled with in this way—at least in what the author is pleased to call a "historical novel".



NOTES

- ¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 238.
- ² *Owen Glendower*, 1941, hereafter designated *OG*, p. 12.
- ³ Humfrey, pp. 240-41.
- ⁴ *OG*, pp. 375-76.
- ⁵ Humfrey, pp. 243-44.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- ⁷ *OG*, p. 821.
- ⁸ *John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape*, 1982, p. 137.
- ⁹ *OG*, pp. 889-90.
- ¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, Preface, x.
- ¹¹ John Cowper Powys, *Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*, 1975, Vol. 2 (1925-1939), p. 126. Referred to hereafter as *LHBL*.
- ¹² In "Maiden Castle and the Celtic Calendar", *The Powys Review*, No. 15 (1984/85), 32-34.
- ¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26. On 23 May 1935 John Cowper records a visit with Phyllis Playter to Bitterley, a village on the slopes of Clee Hill and some eight miles ENE of Ludlow, where had lived Powyses who were "definitely our ancestors". Henley Hall, the Powys residence, though in Bitterley parish, was at least three miles nearer Ludlow, adjacent to the Ludlow-Kidderminster road. *LHBL*, p. 186.
- ¹⁵ *Autobiography*, 1934, p. 25.
- ¹⁶ Louis Marlow, *Welsh Ambassadors* (1936), 1975, p. 47.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.* This was said to be because the arrival of the cuckoo immediately heralded the arrival of the casual farm labourers from Wales.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
- ²⁰ *Autobiography*, pp. 334-35.
- ²¹ J. Y. W. Lloyd, *History of the Princes, the Lords-Marcher and the Ancient Nobility of Powys Fadog*, 1881-87.
- ²² *Autobiography*, pp. 335-36.
- ²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 739.
- ²⁴ Born near Ponterwyd, Cardiganshire, the son of a farm labourer, John Rhys became first a pupil-teacher, then an accredited schoolmaster. At the age of 25 he was offered a scholarship to Jesus College, Oxford. Later a Fellow of Merton, he studied at German universities, became an inspector of schools and in 1877 Professor of Celtic at Jesus College, of which from 1895 until his death he also served as Principal.
- ²⁵ *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx*, 1901, Vol. 2, p. 552.
- ²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 539. "Death is the basis of my religion".
- ²⁷ John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, Carmarthen, 1947, hereafter referred to as *OC*. *Vide* his essay, "Welsh Aborigines", *passim*. The Welsh, he writes, possess "the most conqueror-absorbing powers ever possessed by any nation" (p. 12).
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ²⁹ *A Glastonbury Romance*, hereafter referred to as *AGR*, p. 739.
- ³⁰ Historically "the House of Rhys" could only have been that of Rhys ap Tewdwr, King of Deheubarth, whose court was at Dinefwr Castle near Llandeilo, and of his lineal descendant the Lord Rhys. J.C.P. confirms this deduction (*LHBL*, p. 160), adding that he had "acquired (in my genealogical and antiquarian studies in Cymmerodion [sic] paths of remote learning) such respect" for them. It may be noted that in his American days and even the days of his early residence in Wales his spelling in Welsh was often careless and faulty.
- ³¹ *OC*, p. 32.
- ³² *The Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, enlarged, illustrated edition, 1976, p. 34.
- ³³ "And then was that saying first uttered, and it is still used as a proverb". The modern politician to make use of it was James Callaghan.
- ³⁴ Grassholm, an island off the north-west coast of Pembrokeshire.
- ³⁵ *The Mabinogion*, tr. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, enlarged, illustrated edition, 1976, p. 34.
- ³⁶ *Maiden Castle*, 1936, p. 258.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29. MC page numbers are hereafter included in the text.
- ³⁸ *Vide*, amongst several recent attempts to synthesise the views of modern scholars, Michael Balfour, *Stonehenge and its Mysteries*, 1979, especially pp. 108-28 and p. 134.
- ³⁹ What is known about this battle comes from a long poem attributed to the poet Aneirin, a poem which is neither narrative nor epic but a series of elegies to warriors who fell at Cattraeth. Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson's edition of *The Gododdin*, 1969, is the most complete available.
- ⁴⁰ Ernest Renan (1823-92) was a prominent Breton writer and philosopher. His *Essai sur la Poésie des Races Celtiques* (1854) influenced the views of Matthew Arnold. In Renan's perspective the Celtic nature was reserved and inward-looking, lacking in initiative and political skills, inclined to fatalism and lost causes, but possessing withal a sensitivity and a deep feeling for nature and for all living creatures. "Among the features by which the Celtic races most impressed the Romans", he writes, "were the precision of their ideas upon the future life, their inclination to suicide, and the loans and contracts which they signed with the other world in view". They were seen with some awe as "having an understanding of the future and the secret of death". (The Scott ed. of 1906, pp. 56-57.)
- ⁴¹ I am very much indebted to Ian Hughes for directing my attention to this chapter, which radically altered my view of John Cowper's debt to Sir John Rhys.
- ⁴² *AGR*, p. 734.

⁴³ *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 1954, p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ King Lot, King Nentres, King Angwyschance and the King "with the Hondred Knyghtes", with one or two others, were in the van of this series of individual contests. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-24 in particular.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ John Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, p. 324, l. "Sorhaut", he writes, "doubtless stands for some such a form—as *Sorlianc*—of the name of the Scillies, called *Sorlingues* in modern French".

⁵⁰ Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Quest for Merlin*, 1984, pp. 43-56 in particular.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-43.

⁵² In the *Afallenau* Black Book of Carmarthen text, translated by A. O. H. Jarman and printed by Tolstoy as an Appendix, pp. 252-53) the following extracts, albeit obscure, illustrate this:

"Sweet apple-tree which grows in a glade,
Its peculiar power hides it from the lords of
Rhydderch . . .

Death has taken everyone, why does it not call me?
For after Gwenddolau no lord honours me . . .

⁵³ A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes, *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, 1976, Vol. I, p. 58.

⁵⁴ *OG*, p. 652.

⁵⁵ Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, pp. 250-70 *passim*.

⁵⁶ The Triads of the Isle of Britain (*Tiroedd Ynys Prydain*) are preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, though a few are found as early as *Y Gododdin* and *The Book of Taliesin*. They represent that fondness for triple groupings characteristic of very early Celtic mnemonic and educational practice and together they provide an index of legendary characters and happenings. The particular narrative referred to here is provided in full in Malory Book II ("Balin, or The Knight with the Two Swords"): Balin sought out and killed Garlon, the knight who could make himself invisible: Pellam, who proved to be Garlon's brother, then attacked Balin, who, having lost his sword, wounded his adversary with the spear he found, "the spere whych Longeus smote oure Lorde with to "the herte". Pellam "was nyghe of Joseph his kynne" and his land lay waste until he was healed in "the queste of the Sankgreall". Vinaver, pp. 64-65.

⁵⁷ Rhys, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249, where Rhys discusses the renderings given by Skene and himself.

⁵⁹ *The Mabinogion*, ed. quoted, pp. 145-150.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶¹ The only mediaeval copy of the tale is found in *The Red Book of Hergest*. The story is set in Powys in the reign of Madog ap Maredudd, and dates suggested for its composition have ranged from the mid-twelfth century to the late thirteenth.

⁶² "The Battle of Badon in which Arthur carried the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights . . ." *Vide* Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 1971, pp. 51-52, for the demolition of these objections. It is also possible that a scribal error, the substitution of *scuid* (O. W. *shoulder*) for *scuit* (O. W. *shield*) compounds whatever difficulty there is.

⁶³ *The Mabinogion*, ed. quoted, p. 182.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶⁶ Ragland Phillips, p. 149, quotes this from the *mabinogi of Iarlles y Ffynawn*.

⁶⁷ *OC*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ *Vide* Melville Richards, *The Laws of Hywel Dda*, 1954. Hywel Dda died in 950, but the existing texts of his Laws are dated five or six centuries later. *Sarhad* may be defined as 'insult-price': thus—"If a man beat his wife without cause, let him pay her *sarhad* to her according to her privilege" (which was calculated according to the privilege of her husband). In cases of rape, where the man denies it, the woman's testimony is accepted: "let her take his member in her left hand, and let her swear to his having committed rape upon her, and thus she loses nothing of her right" (*op. cit.*, p. 69).

⁶⁹ The tomb of Vix, near the source of the Seine, is the tomb of a princess or priestess, furnished with rich ornaments of gold and the largest *crater* or drinking-vessel of that age so far discovered. *Vide* René Joffroy, *La Tombe Princière de Vix*, 1968.

⁷⁰ *AGR*, p. 97.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷² "They are said to learn by heart in their studies a great number of verses, and so some remain twenty years under instruction. And they do not think it right to commit these things to writing, although, as a rule, in other matters—in public and private documents—they use Greek characters". *De Bello Gallico*, Book VI (tr. A. A. Irwin Nesbitt).

⁷³ *OC*, p. 139.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁷⁸ *Op. cit.*, (1838), 2nd ed., 1877, p. 482.

⁷⁹ Genesis, c. 5 v. 24.

⁸⁰ Susan Rands, "Maiden Castle: Symbol, Theme and Personality", *The Powys Review*, No. 15, 28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸² *The Brothers Powys*, 1983, pp. 273-74.

⁸³ *The Powys Review*, No. 15, 4.

⁸⁴ Note especially his belief, many times re-iterated, that *Morwyn* is the "best and most deeply-felt and by far the most imaginative book I've ever written" (*LHBL*, p. 235).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁸⁸ *OC*, p. 79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁹² *John Cowper Powys: Letters 1937-1954*, ed. Iorwerth peate, Cardiff, 1974, p. 1.

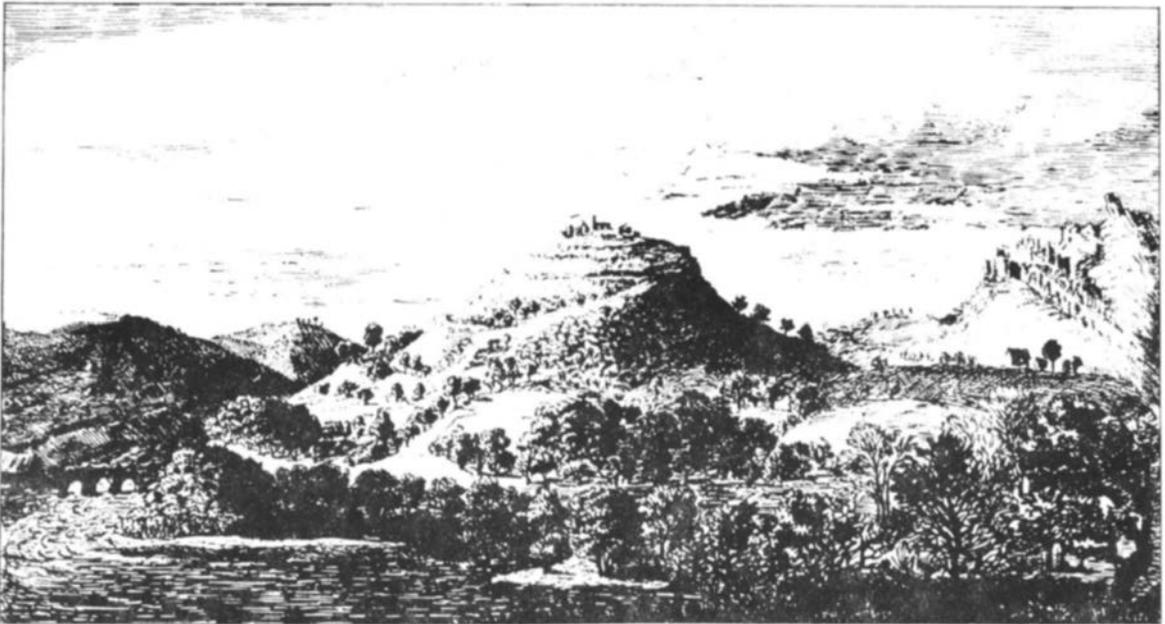
⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *Letters from John Cowper Powys to C. Benson Roberts*, 1975, p. 37.

⁹⁵ *OC*, p. 12.

⁹⁶ *OG*, p. 643.

⁹⁷ It may be relevant to note that in November 1951 he wrote to Benson Roberts about his novel *Porius* as follows: "Personally I think it beats that Glendower book of mine hollow and I can tell you why Ben old crony because of all the ages of mankind the 13th 14th and 15th centuries are to me the most odious detestable and wholly unsympathetic—I even hate their costumes and weapons!" *Letters to Benson Roberts*, p. 92.



Dinas Brân: an illustration in J. Y. W. Lloyd, *The History . . . of Powys Fadog*, Vol. I, 1881.

Colin Style

On Hardy's Sacred Ground: John Cowper Powys's *Weymouth Sands*

I

Time shows no signs of loosening the proprietorial hold that Thomas Hardy has over Dorset. That beautiful country has been carved up, packaged, and frozen in the collective mind of the English-speaking world in the image generated by the great writer's poems and novels. The familiar, obligatory maps of parallel nomenclature continue in fresh editions; names that roll easily and trippingly off the tongue—Casterbridge, Mellstock, Stourcastle, Weatherbury, Shaston and Budmouth. That Hardy's topography is so firmly etched is not only due to his position as a giant of literature. After all, place-names in Dickens, Eliot and Conrad, to draw out some other giants at random, are far less easily recollected and associated.

The place-names of Wessex are entrenched by simplicity, consistency, and repetition in the series of novels and poems. And this familiarization is reinforced by Hardy's vivid and dramatic use of character and incident. We relate to the places where Michael Henchard dies, in despair but with integrity intact; where Tess is hanged: and, even, in more idyllic circumstances, the seaside where Dick Dewey meets Fancy Day.

Nonetheless, Hardy's commanding association with geographical Wessex is not, in a sense, entirely deserved, since topography is frequently irrelevant to the thematic issues. Almost any one of Hardy's poems is exemplary of this, like "At Casterbridge Fair: Former Beauties":

These market-dames, mid-aged, with lips
thin-drawn,
And tissues sere,
Are they the ones we loved in years ago,
And courted here?

Are these the muslined pink young things
to whom

We vowed and swore
In nooks on summer Sundays by the Froom,
Or Budmouth shore?

'Froom' and 'Budmouth' have no direct relationship with the death of youth, love and innocence. They merely add to musical sonority and a vague verisimilitude of local association.

It constitutes a paradox that, whilst Hardy's *leit-motiv* is man struggling against the backdrop of a harsh, indifferent universe, the reader yet draws man and an omnipresent country closely together; a process that tacitly assumes that the universe *does* somehow mould and interpenetrate man.

Such a contradiction in Hardy's position would have been well-noticed by John Cowper Powys. For any author proposing to set a novel in Wessex, a deep and careful study of Thomas Hardy would be obligatory. Powys, of course, knew Hardy personally, and was encouraged by him. but, in his novel, *Weymouth Sands*, he still diverges radically from Hardy.¹

Although it might seem a problem for a Dorset writer to find space outside the giant shadow cast by the old master, Hardy's narrative methods and areas of interest actually reflect the fairly narrowly specialised requirements of his own creative needs, and he left large areas untapped for his successors. The explicit exploration of sexuality is one obvious untapped area, and Powys certainly exploits this. However, Powys also directly involves locality, in a way that Hardy never did, and attempts to reveal in *Weymouth Sands* how the rich promiscuous, multifarious environment of the old

seaside resort profoundly affects and interpenetrates human lives. Each character developed to any length, intones the sacristic landmarks—St Alban's head, the White Nose, the Nothe, Chesil Beach, the Breakwater, the Town Bridge, the White Horse, Hardy's Monument, Lodmoor, King George's Statue, St John's Spire, and the Jubilee Clock. These names and places, of course, are actual and not fictitious, and the references are so frequent that it is as if Powys is seeking to out-Hardy Hardy and break his monopoly over the Dorset terrain in readers' minds. Indeed, on occasion, the cataloguing seems almost obsessional:

She left the bridge, passed the front of Trinity Church, followed the North Quay to Sidney Hall, and then hurried along Newstead Road. She passed the turns into Granville Road, Ilchester Road, and Abbotsbury Road and soon after this crossing arrived at Swan Villa. (95)

Hardy's Wessex has become sanctified by a magic circle in English literature; almost a Lyonesse. Yet, it is depicted with a basic, almost uniform, tincture. Egdon Heath is sketched as a pathetic fallacy, the embodiment of a presence compounded out of a certain delicious contemplation of death, nostalgia for the past, and desolation. Powys could be reacting against this *and* against the wider and longer literary tradition of assuming that human personality matches landscape in a crude and obvious way.

It is a convention so taken for granted that its basic falsity is seldom questioned. As part of a gratuitous, associative process, fine writing assumes that there is an objective ethos in place that must be deferred to: like Wordsworth matching the qualities of Grasmere; Hardy the serene, austere, Dorset countryside; Emily Bronte the wild and moody moors. Powys reacts against such easy connectives, seeking, as he does, mythology and mysticism through complex plaiting of lives and environment, even through the mundane recitation of the minutiae of street directions. When he was planning the novel, he wrote to his brother

Littleton, asking "for any old tumbled to bits guide-books".²

He also sturdily blocks any Hardeian nostalgia, mourning and regrets; notwithstanding that he loves Weymouth's 'ancientness', he never departs from present preoccupations in the lives of the towns folk. This is impressive—remembering that Powys loved Weymouth as an idyll where he spent many happy childhood holidays. Possibly his extremely unhappy years at Sherborne School plus the memory of a somewhat forbidding father combined to compensate against self-indulgent, retrograde journeys into the past through his characters as surrogates.

II

If Hardy deals with topography and emotion in a typical way, he also has favourite devices in plot which act as a *deus ex machina* in the destinies of his characters. A common compulsion is the use of the innocent but deadly letter. It is a valentine from Bathsheba Everdene that sets farmer Boldwood onto his tragic trajectory. Then there is the confessional letter that Tess suicidally keeps trying to press on Angel Clare. Powys subverts the device. The townspeople in *Weymouth Sands* are also fond of passing notes and letters. However, the consequences are unimportant and can even provide a useful metaphor on the human condition. The bi-sexual Peg Frampton secretes love letters to Daisy Lily in a private post-box. But Weymouth is tolerant and uninterested in the lesbian penchants of young girls. The indolent and melancholy Rodney Loder scribbles on a blank piece of paper, "Rodney Loder—at the end of his tether" (185). Daisy Lily is visiting, and when he leaves the room she glances at it. He returns and feels uncomfortable as to whether she has seen the melodramatic message to himself. But, the paper is in the same position and her manner apparently unchanged. He supposes she has not seen it but an unspoken bond has grown between them which, nonetheless, leads to nothing.

The incident is typical of many eccentric, serio-comic incidents in *Weymouth Sands*: the complement of characters being more than adequately represented by ineffectual, quirky dreamers.

They are also quirky in their sexuality. Powys develops this aspect at some length, and seems to steer a course between Hardy, and Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology*. Masters and Powys were friends and he could hardly have failed to read the American's contemporaneous bestseller. He avoids Hardy's technique of portraying sex as a mysterious event which could have enormous, even catastrophic, consequences—for example, Alec D'Urberville's seduction of Tess. He also avoids Lee Masters's rather simplistic aim to show how small-town lives can be as ugly and sordid as those in big cities. Powys's approach is the sanest and most naturalistic. He hardly touches on physical descriptions of sexual congress. Rather, he explores how sexual reveries and phantasies mould the everyday lives of the Weymouth townsfolk. The exposés are unexpected and startling rather than tragic or ugly. When it is revealed that the theatre dancer Tossty, who is believed to be the mistress of the great music-hall clown, Jerry Cobbold, turns out to be consumed by a lesbian, incestuous passion for her sister Tissty, and that Cobbold is actually involved with his sister-in-law Hortensia Lily, the reader's reaction, probably, is a raised eyebrow rather than shock or sadness. And when Magnus Muir, the middle-aged mooning schoolteacher, is ditched by the beautiful shop-girl, Curly Wix, for the town financier Dogberry (Dog) Cattistock, there is no great wringing of hands. The sadder but wiser Magnus Muir soldiers on. Which, of course, is what generally happens in the real world.

It is difficult to determine what is the 'real world' in *Weymouth Sands* since Powys has more than a penchant for the metaphysician's probing for ultimate reality. This is unlike Hardy who maintains the pessimist's and fatalist's view of a simple, consistent reality. Powys limits himself in another

respect. The physical ambience of the novel is kept entirely to Weymouth. Not only are the townsfolk insular and ingrown but all action is confined to its environs. If a character leaves Weymouth—for example, when Adam Skald, the Jobber, journeys to next-door Dorchester—he passes out of sight and mind of the reader until he reappears. The narrative does not follow him out. It is like falling off the edge of the Mediaeval flat earth. This enclosed purview is so rigorously maintained that the rest of England is not even mentioned. The only exception is the boat that comes from the Channel Islands. Perdita Wane, the somewhat forlorn companion to Mrs. Cobbold, travels from Guernsey on it. She refers to the island fleetingly, in her thoughts, before the whole passionate cast of her attention becomes absorbed by Jobber Skald. The characters are similarly contained. It is almost a stereotype of popular novels concerning remote towns that there is at least one character, often a young, budding writer, who yearns to escape. There is a host of Powys characters who dream of altering their circumstances—Curly Wix, Ruth Loder, Rodney Loder, Richard Gaul, Peg Frampton, Daisy Lily, Jerry Cobbold. All have discontented yearnings and impulses. However, leaving never occurs to them as a solution. They have "a patience that approached, if it never could quite attain, the faint, dim embryonic half-consciousness that brooded in the sea-weeds, the sea-shells, the sea-anemones, the star-fish and jelly-fish, that lay submerged along those beaches and among those rock-pools" (190).

If the more enterprising inhabitants of Weymouth want to escape from themselves, there is one place they can release their *alter egos*. This is at the house of decadent delights owned by Dr Girodel the abortionist. Curly Wix escapes here from her solemn suitor, Magnus Muir, to disport with the handsome young Sippy Ballard. Jerry Cobbold escapes from his difficult wife: "With Girodel alone the comedian removed that mask which Perdita had so acutely

divined. To the quack doctor he showed his real face, a face which was so sick of life that the sight of it would have disconcerted any—less heartless than the cynical tenant of Sark House” (223).

Weymouth accommodates all conditions of the mind and spirit. The Ultima Thule for the towns-folk is Dr Brush's asylum called Hell's Museum:

Merely to imagine that those red-brick buildings contained animals in the process of being vivisected, and contained also hopelessly insane people whose death would be a comfort and relief to everyone concerned, was something that gave the spot an atmosphere of such horror that he fidgeted in his seat and felt sick in his stomach as if he were going to see an execution. (118-19)

The locale can be oppressively intense. Its complete circumscriptions dictate that relief or variation can only be obtained by geocentrically spinning even more deeply into the centre. In Hardy's Wessex, space is more elastic. In fact, it is the opposite of claustrophobic or enveloping, and, far from the characters being immobilised by a spiritual centrifugal force, they have problems holding on and not being flung outwards from the epicentre. The Durbeyfield family is evicted from its tithe-cottage after John Durbeyfield dies. Jude Fawley has to tramp the length and breadth of Wessex making a miserable living carving inscriptions on headstones. Clym Yeobright, after the cycle of tragedy is completed in *Return of the Native*, becomes an itinerant preacher.

In spite of Weymouth's boundaries being intensely circumscribed, Powys's view of the town is not static or stereotyped. He describes it with a wealth of analogy and metaphor. In this passage, he has Magnus Muir ruminate with Hardeian melancholy:

He . . . pulled the red curtains a little way across that familiar oblong space of darkness and wet.

He then slowly undressed himself in front of the few crimson coals that remained of his fire, while his candles spluttered themselves into extinction. And as he undressed himself the familiar smell of dead seaweed kept

entering his room; and a strange phantasmal Weymouth, a mystical town made of a solemn sadness, gathered itself about him, a town built out of the smell of dead seaweed, a town whose very walls and roof were composed of flying spindrift and tossing rain. Lying in bed in the faint glimmer from the grate he could hear the waves on the beach, and a great flood of sadness swept over him. Human hearts seemed all so pitifully frustrated! (38-9)

It is, incidentally, no doubt an unconscious borrowing that the last two sentences of this extract are a paraphrase of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach":

Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and
fling,

At their return, up the high strand.
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

However evocative, such reflections are essentially limited, constituting a simple sadness uprisen from the traditional triggers of darkness, cold, loneliness, and the sea, in close proximity. Jobber Skald, however, when he stops on the Esplanade to reflect on his growing interest in Perdita Wane, develops the relationship between the town and his sensibility with much more depth:

The Jobber's own bodily form disappeared under the tyranny of his thought as completely as did the form of the old king; and in their stead a procession of mental images and intentions filled that hollow gulf in time and space . . . The hollow statue of the old King now became a sounding-board for the Jobber's memories of his gross erotic life; a life which he had not scrupled to keep on a very earthy and a very sensual plane. (65)

It makes a convenient contrast that Dick Dewey should meet Fancy Day on exactly the same spot in *Under the Greenwood Tree*:

The scene was the corner of Mary Street in Budmouth-Regis, near the King's statue, at which point the white angle of the last house in the row cut perpendicularly an embayed and nearly motionless expanse of salt water projected from the outer ocean—to-day lit in

bright tones of green and opal. Dick and Smart had just emerged from the street, and there on the right, against the brilliant sheet of liquid colour, stood Fancy Day; and she turned and recognised him.

Powys and Hardy present completely opposed views of the same scene. In Jobber's perception the Esplanade is moulded by the cast of his thoughts and, at the same time, it participates in his innermost feelings and sensations. With Dick Dewey and Fancy Day, however, the Esplanade is a fleeting moment, and the backdrop of the Bay is merely a stage setting to enhance Fancy's beauty, like the palms in an old photographic studio.

III

Nonetheless, the world of *Weymouth Sands* is not depicted with consistency. It is difficult, on occasion, to determine whether this is because Powys is recognising the shifting nature of reality or is just pursuing a poetic analogy of the moment:

And the obliviousness of Rodney and Daisy to that crying of the gulls above Spy Croft added a new burden, a new weight, a new quota of insensibility to the age-old indifference of so many human souls of the two Boroughs to the objects and to the sounds that had become the tutelary background of the place. (189-90)

"Tutelary" is distinctly Wordsworthian and inimical to Hardy's suggestion of a universe that is cruel and unknowing—an ambivalent concept that includes, of course, two logically exclusive propositions. Cruelty is a *conscious* act. But Powys also contributes his own illogicalities since 'insensible' and 'indifferent souls' cannot respond to a "tutelary background". In fact, *Weymouth Sands* conveys an overwhelming impression of human co-existence with environment and nature. Even the episode where Rodney Loder scribbles the exclamation that Daisy Lily sees is a subtle metaphor of how we co-exist and correspond with the natural world. Messages are passed that we believe are not received but which, nonetheless, create a sympathy and union.

If this is subtle and penetrating, on other occasions Powys can be irritatingly woolly in his philosophical propositions:

Certain words that have come down to us in the fluctuating borderland between religion and philosophy, words such as 'absolute', 'essence', 'eternity', 'immortality', conveyed when Sylvanus made use of them, a much more concrete and much more definite meaning than is usual with such expressions. By reducing the sensations of consciousness to the most primitive elements he had at last arrived at the point of establishing a certain rapport between himself and the cosmos which gave him a deeper sense of power and a deeper feeling of satisfaction than most people experience all their lives. (271)

The reader is unlikely to stay close to this and other passages possessing a similar vaporourness. They raise a question as to the validity of Powys's method and style as a novelist and his ambitious attempt to individuate a subsection of Wessex. It is not sufficient to be distinctive without offering a commensurate value, and, to decide this, a series of urgent questions has to be postulated and answered: What is he writing about in *Weymouth Sands*?—an interpretative, but still basically objective, portrait of the town and townsfolk? or a fictive domain created by his imagination and plastered with topographical references to convey verisimilitude? What is Powys's central philosophy? What are his notions as to the nature of reality? How well does he represent his theories?

On the question as to the sort of Weymouth Powys is writing about, I can rely on some personal knowledge of the resort, coupled with sentimental associations. My own family had been coachmakers there for a hundred years, living and working out of premises at the very centre of the novel—the Esplanade, Brunswick Terrace, and the old, narrow trade streets lying behind, like Lennox Street, St Nicholas and St Thomas Street. I should say that I visited Weymouth *before* I read the novel. This is probably desirable. To go, book in hand, would have drawn me to the

same perceptions and impressions; whereas, reading the book afterwards. I was able to compare Powys's descriptions with those I had noticed independently. Also advantageous was that both Powys and I shared the same sentimental perspective: he, writing the book in America from a memory of the idealised scene of his childhood holidays; and myself, idealising by way of roots pilgrimage. So, when Magnus Muir feels that "it was one of those geographical points on the surface of the planet that would surely rush into his mind when he came to die, as a concentrated essence of all that life meant" (23), I could participate in the strength of emotional investment.

The participation is primarily confined to a shared emotional attachment and the evocation of Weymouth scenes and places. As the "Note By Author" explains:

All the events and characters in this book are pure invention, except in the case of Magnus Muir and of Sylvanus Cobbold, where certain characteristics and peculiarities have been taken from the nature of the author himself. There is, to the author's knowledge, no such Institution as 'Hell's Museum' anywhere in Dorset, certainly not near Weymouth, and if the author has used any well-known Wessex names for his imaginary persons, it was purely in order to enhance the verisimilitude of his tale. (15)

The claim that it is all 'invention' should not be accepted without qualification. There is a considerable number of novels in English literature, with uncanny resemblances to persons living or dead, which the authors claim are pure invention. Somerset Maugham's covert portrait of Hardy in *Cakes and Ale* springs to mind. In Powys's case, the disclaimer deserves a certain respect, remembering that his immediately preceding novel, *A Glastonbury Romance*, had resulted in expensive litigation. There is, however, one problem in accepting that the characters in *Weymouth Sands* are unique products of Powys's invention. As he is demonstrating how the locale of Weymouth moulds the personality and sensibility of the townsfolk, it should breed types who occur

timelessly and wait to be recognised. However, the way they are presented in the novel puts them out of the province of the time-traveller and tourist, such as myself. They interact between themselves, and no transients are portrayed. It is part of the containment in the magic circle.

With the outsider excluded from Powys's Weymouth inhabitants, I received a confirmatory impression of the secretive opaqueness that he writes about. For a start, I was presented with a strong metaphor on the closed door of the past when I visited the old family premises on West Street. A bomb, in the War, had obliterated many of the houses, and it was now a car-park. The obliteration of the past is also evidenced by the green, moist, idyllic Dorset countryside behind Weymouth. In a different way, I was struck how it flows like a green wave over the past. Headstones crumble and inscriptions quickly become indecipherable.

The hermetic lives of the Weymouth townsfolk are a barrier against the shifting, seasonal population. Today, so I was told, the residents running the boarding-houses and small hotels, put up their shutters after the season, and winter on Social Security payments. There is, almost, a resentment when the winter's hibernation is disturbed. Like all sectors who traditionally, through history, have owed their livelihood to transients, there is a resistance to the outsider.

Significantly, the novel opens in January when Magnus Muir encounters an unseasonable Punch-and-Judy Show, run by Marret Jones and her father, playing to a forlorn group of shivering children. Punch and Judy are a mediating symbol throughout the book of the private, domestic strife in Weymouth that has to run through the system—Jerry Cobbold and his estranged wife; Dog Cattistock and Hortensia Lily's forthcoming, ill-starred marriage; Magnus Muir and his middle-aged infatuation with Curly Wix; Jobber Skald's homicidal designs on Cattistock and his redemption with Perdita Wane; the growing restiveness in the town at the juvenile, Marret Jones, living with Sylvanus Cobbold—albeit that their relationship is quite Platonic.

When Powys does mention tourists, they are not essential to the dynamics of the novel, but rather, adorn it, as in this evocative portrait:

Those dusky worm diggers were like remorseless grave diggers of another vanished day of pure delight. Questions of work and wages began to heave up their heads. The irresponsible Homeric hour had fled, and in place of it the sad, austere Hesiodic wisdom had begun to prevail. Sand in their shoes, slippery ribband-seaweed in their hands, shell-boxes as glittering as old Poxwell's pressed against their breasts, tired, crying, scolding, quarrelling, vomiting, urinating, with pathetically helpless star-fish and jelly-fish from the free sea perishing cruelly in their hot, human clutches, many of the holiday people were already moving slowly down King's Street towards the Station, preferring—or at least the children's mothers preferring—to sit for half-an-hour on a dusty bench rather than lose the chance of a choice of pleasant window seats, when the seven o'clock train to Dorchester was actually ready. (490-91)

A further element towards the privatization of Weymouth, and one where Powys most infuses it with his individual imagination, is through sexuality. The Weymouth world is rendered 'glaucous' (a word Powys uses frequently) and languid by the sexual phantasies of his characters in which lesbianism, incest, and *voyeurism* figure. Many are sexually avid but curiously withdrawn. Ruth Loder, Peg Frampton, Curly Wix, Tissty and Tossty, Daisy Lily, and Perdita Wane phantasise but are reluctant, or slow, to enter outward relationships. This has an opiate effect on the natural world:

'Did she want him to?' she wondered to herself, letting her eyes wander across 'the wet sand' and across 'the dry sand', to the white wall of the esplanade. There was a young man sitting on a bench on the esplanade, and Marret indistinctly let her clothes drop down. 'Did she want him to?' (334)

Whilst it is possible to argue that this is a personal interpretation peculiar to Powys's vision, it is, nonetheless, also true that sexual phantasies are part of the universal human psyche. The only uniqueness is in

Powys's infusing it into the exterior world that the senses are absorbing.

However, some aspects of Weymouth that Powys describes I recapitulated to an almost uncanny degree. I remember sitting on the Esplanade, near the Jubilee Clock, one day in the long, hot summer of 1976. For an hour, I felt it was a psychic geocentre, and that the essence of my existence was being concentrated for a fraction in time. It was with a sense of confirmatory surprise that I read, "How well he knew this spot! It was one of those geographical points on the surface of the planet that would surely rush into his mind when he came to die, as a concentrated essence of all that life meant!" (23). So Magnus Muir ruminates on nearly the identical spot to where I sat. That evening, I looked out of the window from the boarding-house, on the corner of Brunswick Terrace, where we were staying. It was raining, and the refracted lights on the Esplanade and on the boats across the harbour stirred a wealth of feelings and perceptions. The wet lamps were dripping with a strong, if undefinable significance. At numerous points in *Weymouth Sands*, the different characters attest to the poetry and mysterious, gravitational significance of the Esplanade. Powys's passionate sense of place owed something to a distancing process. He wrote *Weymouth Sands* substantially when living in Phudd in up-state New York. He lovingly remembered how he would swim out of his depth off Weymouth to savour the feeling of becoming part of land, sea, and air. So, it is possible that Powys's refracting Weymouth, through childhood and geographical distance, and myself, through sentimental family lives, could result in seeing the same things transmuted into the same level of mystical significance—different processes securing the same results. Another explanation might be that the arrangement of the buildings and objects on the Esplanade might match and arouse some emotional, aesthetic state in the unconscious. It is fortuitously populated with symbols and archetypes that can touch the inner core.



This is a line of thought that can dissipate into a dangerous vagueness. To be convinced of this interpenetration of Weymouth town and townsfolk, the reader should find a hard residuum of sense and truth that can be communicated. It is insufficient to propound a sort of polytheism and make reference to 'the presence in things'. Roy Campbell has satirised other writers and poets, as in "A Veld Eclogue":

... reader who are we to tell them, 'No!'
 We, who have never heard the 'call', or felt
 The witching whatdyecallum of the veld?

It could add to a communication problem that Powys can be both cryptic and extravagant. He feels a joy in the poetry of experience, and enjoys the romantic's sense of the values of the liberated, even eccentric, style of life.

By the same token, it is difficult to decide if Sylvanus Cobbold is truly a 'mystic', as described in the *dramatis personae* prefixing the novel, or just a highly eccentric bohemian. Powys's appeal would probably be wider in general readership if he curbed his flood of perceptions with touches of lucid but penetrating vision. Articulating what readers have half-noticed, but not expressed themselves, creates a readiness to search trustfully in obscurer metaphysical passages. Hardy, of course, possessed the knack of the neat, simple but penetrating, observation. "The Darkling Thrush" in December, flinging "his soul / Upon the growing gloom" which suggests to the poet "Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware", is just one illustration. The combination of vivid, dramatic characterisation, poignant and tragic incidents, *and* crisp, terse observations and analogies, contribute to Hardy's dominance of Wessex—particularly when placed in context of repetitiously-used place-name coinages that are, nonetheless, easily matched with real names and locations.

Powys does possess a quiver of insights but, most often, they are presented with luscious diffusion:

On this occasion that sudden whistle of the Cherbourg steamer produced a very queer

impression on his mind. It was an impression as if the whole of Weymouth had suddenly become an insubstantial vapour suspended in space. All the particular aspects of the place known to him so well, the spire of St. John's Church, the rounded stucco-façade of Number One Brunswick Terrace and of Number One St. Mary's Street, the Jubilee Clock, the Nothe, the statue of George the Third, seemed to emerge gigantically from a mass of vapourous unreality. This hallucination, or whatever it was, lasted a very short time. (25-26)

It irresistibly suggests a Turner landscape and seems to express a fairly common experience—that feeling of dissociation and sense of unreality induced by a sudden change in external stimuli. But such diffuse, poetic writing needs anchoring to a systematic set of metaphysical beliefs to be persuasive and credible. Powys's informing philosophy seems to owe much to Bergson and the Ionian Heraclitus; the vitalism of the past; the influence of the spirit on matter through memory and perception; the original and spontaneous action of psychic states on the

laws of nature; the *élan vital* and striving upwards of organic matter against inert matter; the Heraclitean concept of a world in harmonious flux contrary to static appearance. One or other of these fragmentary statements can be credibly fitted at almost any point in the novel. Particularly Bergsonian is how Powys seems to view Weymouth as part of the living psychic past:

She was herself removing with her gloved fingers a few of Mortmain's black hairs from the blue edging of her jacket; and as her brother watched her he suddenly had a mystical feeling that he had seen her make this precise gesture in some dimension of Time, where neither Spy Croft, nor even Weymouth itself, had any reality. (181)

IV

Chapter 13, "Punch and Judy", is particularly important. Here Powys expatiates on the imagery of sand and indicates its significance in being elevated into the title of the novel. He develops the difference between wet and dry sands and their



symbolic importance, both in terms of Bergsonian philosophy on the nature of reality, and, for purely artistic analogy, the poetic structure of the novel. "Dry sand" is equated with gross matter, and "wet sand" with the "printless feet" of spirit—it is the infusion of spirit into things. It is the sea washing and making deliquescent the sands of dried-out relationships; perhaps it is the conversion of the dry past into the viscous present, or *vice-versa*. Whichever, it is the redemptive infusion into a reality grown stale and unviable.

Powys eclectically adapted from other writers. There are intriguing echoes in Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*—like Beelzebub's declamation from the "Epilogue":

Starve him, shame him, fling him down,
Whirled in the vortex of the town.
Break him, age him, till he curse
The idiot face of the universe.
Over and over we mix the clay,—
What was dust is alive to-day.

Weymouth Sands reacts against the black pessimism of both *Spoon River* and Thomas Hardy. However, "Whirled in the vortex of the town" seems a neat summation of what Powys is attempting. Elsewhere in *Spoon River*, "Davis Matlock" says in his epitaph:

Well, I say to live it out like a god
Sure of immortal life, though you are in
doubt,
Is the way to live it.
If that doesn't make God proud of you
Then God is nothing but gravitation,
Or sleep is the golden goal.

It adduces to the centrifugal effect of *Weymouth Sands* that equating God with gravitation is not disparagement. It equates with Heraclitean flux and the interpretation of matter as being of the same stuff but varying in density between spirit as ether and heavy matter such as stones and inanimate objects. Weymouth is a potter's wheel in which the elements are whirled and shaped. Ambiguously, spiritual ether (*vide* human spirit) might be flung outwards and the heavy settle at the centre; or, heavy matter

might constitute the intractable surrounds, the rim of the pot, with ether at the centre—the Esplanade. As the Jubilee Clock is Janus-faced, so Powys is ambiguous, echoing the *Rubaiyat*:

And, strange to tell, amongst the Earthen Lot
Some could articulate, while others not:
And suddenly one more impatient cried—
'Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?'

Powys, incidentally, was no more Christian, or, at least, monotheistic, than Hardy. However, he escapes such charges as G. K. Chesterton flung at Hardy as a "sort of village atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot", largely because he is essentially optimistic and his characters are generally cheerful and enduring. He permits a redemptive goodness in the world.

That the same symbols, analogies, and metaphors are repeated belies the superficially sprawling nature of the novel—it travels in wide, discursive circles of poetic extravagance of phrasing and analogising but keeps a consistent centre. It was a constraint he was conscious of when he discussed rewriting "from the very start my Weymouth Romance: for I'd made it too big, too long & since Glastonbury won't sell I *must* write shorter . . . this foundation . . . was huge . . . and I must get all the stones nearer the Centre now".³

V

The reader, grappling with Powysian metaphysics, is likely to find him most accessible in his beliefs regarding society and the individual. In *The Meaning of Culture*, Powys writes: "Culture aims at producing a free spirit, in the deepest sense: free, that is to say, from the fanaticisms of religion, the fanaticisms of science, and from the fanaticisms of the mob".⁴ In *Suspended Judgments*, he writes of "Utopian absence of any government . . . whereof all free spirits dream".⁵ Weymouth is idealised in that the paraphernalia of law and order and moral censure is minimal. True, Sylvanus Cobbold is committed to Dr Brush's Hell's Museum after Marret Jones goes to live with him and

her father complains. However, apart from this, the town seems delightfully to run itself. Jobber Skald is able to go round the public houses, threatening homicide to Dog Cattistock without restraint. The most appealing feature is the highly democratic and unsnobbish behaviour of the townsfolk. Marret Jones runs after the middle-aged Sylvanus Cobbold; Magnus Muir falls for the shop girl, Curly Wix; Dog Cattistock and Jerry Cobbold, respectively the richest and most famous man in the town, frequent the public houses and the disreputable doctor's Sark House, mixing and drinking with the *hoi polloi*. (It reflects Powys's own egalitarian temperament. As a Cambridge undergraduate, with a temporarily strong interest in Christian Socialism, he once dragged a tramp in to tea at Invicta House, Brunswick Terrace, where he was staying.) The most sincere expression of equality is in the way he allows them all to reflect upon life and themselves in a profound way. Powys parcels out his philosophy equally amongst them all and bestows a unity on the way the Weymouth townsfolk think, dream and act. That so many of them happen to be apathetic dreamers in no small way contributes to the poetic, haunting, quality of the book which can, on occasion, deepen into stagnancy. Dog Cattistock, Sylvanus Cobbold, and Jobber Skald, possess a certain energy and passion, but they cannot entirely off-set Richard Gaul, Magnus Muir, Lucinda Cobbold, Ruth and Rodney Loder, Peg Frampton, and Curly Wix, who exude the passivity, decay and mystery of a museum room of specimens. Hardy's Wessex peasants incline to a homely sententiousness; but, it is quite different from the denizens of Weymouth, whose reflections carry an almost learned, literary quality. Even the mad boy, Larry Zed, who is not mad so much as backward, can be judicial:

Larry Zed contemplated this scene, from behind his friend, in dumb amazement. The white-cheeked girl was bending over the cat now and stroking it; and it was borne in upon the mind of the boy how unaccountable both cats and women can be, in their ambiguous moves towards their desired ends. (145-46)

The depth and detail of their thoughts suggest a biographical infusion from Powys. There is a truth and intimacy about them and, since so many of the Weymouth characters think and feel in this uniformly original, even eccentric, way, one sees Powys's highly idiosyncratic imagination spread like a skin over the whole cast of characters. Comparison with Hardy on this consideration is not to Powys's advantage. Hardy, whilst he cannot, more than any other writer, completely suppress his private, symbolic repertoire of personal experience and beliefs, controls it and writes of his gallery of characters in a more public way. It is his high Victorian suppression that results in the incisive clarity and simplicity allowing him to handle the classical principles of tragedy—one or two crucial issues, or flaws, in a handful of dominant, highly individualised, characters. Profiles of *Weymouth Sands* characters, however, like Jobber Skald and Sylvanus Cobbold, are blurred because they all think and feel in a similar style—this is notwithstanding Powys intends to project each as a unique character.

Reading *Weymouth Sands* constituted my third return to Weymouth. After that golden summer of 1976, we had gone back for a second visit in the following September. I should have been warned. Cardinal Newman, I think it was, once remarked, in one of his essays, that when you take a new route in a walk in the country it is all fresh and exciting. There is benefit in a heightened, toned sensibility. Recurrent walks along the same road, however, become dreary and laborious. So it was with Weymouth. It was a dull, cloudy day, with patches of rain. The cold wind whipped along the Esplanade. That last summer, we had lodged with a kindly, genial couple on the corner of Brunswick Terrace. This time, we had to make do with a traditionally fearsome seaside landlady with dyed red hair and an aggressive manner. When we asked to bath twice in two days, she exclaimed, 'What again!' in deepest displeasure. This time, there was nothing fresh to discover, and we could only go commem-

oratively over the old ground that, the summer before, had been the scene of excited explorations.

Weymouth Sands, however, created something of that first sense of amplitude and prescribed a realistic attitude. After all, Powys does not claim that Weymouth is perfect and beautiful—only that, if you are looking at it aright, it has a flawed magic and power. It analogises Perdita Wane's feelings for the Jobber: "'Our love is no ordinary love,' she thought. 'We could quarrel fiercely, we could separate in blind anger, but nothing could ever really divide us, now we've once met.' . . . 'It's funny how I don't really admire him or respect him or even altogether *like* him!'" (345).

Similarly, this extract could reflect a provisional attitude to the novel itself. Something remains that is unsatisfactory and needs to be settled, although we return

to it. In carving out a fiefdom deep in the heart of Wessex, Powys left something out. Is it a determination to set out and capture the reader's attention—such as one senses in Hardy, which, because territorial imperatives are only secondary, succeeds brilliantly *because* of effortlessness? For all his brilliant gifts, Powys's powerful regionalism fluctuates between transcendent vision and eccentric whimsy. He is too indulgent in extravagant poetry to either, like Hardy, coolly assume topography, or, like the Hindu adept, pursue reality to the point of being able to present a *fait accompli: there thou art*.

Powys's love for native Dorset was unquestioned, and when he died his ashes were scattered off Chesil Beach. But, the final question remaining is; was a passionate, detailed regional awareness enough?

NOTES

¹ John Cowper Powys, *Weymouth Sands* (1934) London: Macdonald, 1963. All references are to this edition.

² John Cowper Powys, "Letters to Littleton C. Powys, 1927-1934", *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. Belinda Humfrey, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972, p. 329.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁴ John Cowper Powys, *The Meaning of Culture* (1930) London: Village Press, 1974, p. 90.

⁵ John Cowper Powys, *Suspended Judgments* (1916) London: Village Press, 1975.

Peter G. Christensen

Middlemarch: A Point of Reference in *Weymouth Sands*

When Jobber Skald goes to Cove House in Chapter 3 of *Weymouth Sands*, shortly after his first encounter with Perdita Wane, he occupies himself over dinner by reading *Middlemarch*.

He ate slowly, turning over the pages of "Middlemarch" with patient resolution—one page to about ten mouthfuls—for the satisfaction he got from reading while he ate was not so much in the reading itself—the Jobber could not be called a bookish man—as in the consciousness that he *was* reading. For he generally liked the idea of reading a nice solid library book as he ate his supper in the bachelor parlour. Old Miss Burt, the librarian of that St. Mary's Street Shop, derived extreme pleasure from assisting 'Mr. Adam', for she had known him all his life, in the development of his literary taste; and as her own taste ran, or she thought it ran, to works far removed from 'this modern realism', the Jobber had lived to see great liners fed by oil without having followed the course of his country's fiction further than the middle of the nineteenth century.¹

There is a certain amount of humour here in terms of Powys's own position as a novelist. If the world had not moved past George Eliot, then Powys would not have looked as if he had been left behind by the course of modern fiction. He would not have been seen by some as a sidelight to be discussed after Conrad, Joyce, Woolf and Ford. On the other hand, why bother to mention *Middlemarch* at all, since Jobber isn't really that caught up in that novel anyway?

As everyone knows, *Middlemarch* (1872) holds a central place in F. R. Leavis's "great tradition" of English literature. Some critics think of it as the finest English social novel of the nineteenth century. Indeed, as Glen Cavaliero comments, if we look at Powys's novels by the yardstick of this great tradition,

we can only become impatient with his work.² Not only is Powys not as concerned with the fine points of moral decision-making as George Eliot was, but his novels look poorly constructed beside hers. To make his case, Cavaliero even goes on to compare a passage by each author—Rosamond's attraction to Lydgate in Chapter 11 of *Middlemarch* and Wolf Solent's feelings for Gerda as they walk together through the fields.

Cavaliero does not mention any specific relationship between *Weymouth Sands* and *Middlemarch*; perhaps because they seem so unlike, the effort is not worth the trouble. However, there is one clear similarity that does prompt an investigation. Both *Middlemarch* and *Weymouth Sands* are novels about an entire town and they include an extremely diverse cast of characters. I believe it is for this purpose that Powys calls our attention to a contrasting way of describing a human community, so that we understand the significance of his abandonment of the great tradition.

Middlemarch is based on Coventry, where George Eliot spent many years, but she has disguised most of its particular features, and the human, rather than the geographical community, moves to the forefront. We lack any sense of Middlemarch as a unique landscape. Instead it appears more often as a representative town of c. 1830. In the novel, most of the important actions take place indoors, not outside, as in *Weymouth Sands*.

Powys offered his own ideas about landscape in an article in the November 1933 issue of *The Modern Thinker*. In the first paragraph of this essay, "Remembrances", he writes of *Weymouth Sands*:

The dominant purpose of this book is to show how there is something in human life that by slow degrees creates a reciprocity between itself and any particular scene where it has existed, and lived and moved and been happy and sad, for a considerable number of years. The book deals in fact with the psychic interplay of spiritual and chemical forces, between nature and men and women, in one particular spot. There has been for me a peculiar interest in writing this book in view of the fact that Weymouth, is of all places, whether of town or country, the one most constantly familiar to me from my earliest infancy.³

The clue here to the difference between Powys and Eliot is in the idea of forces (psychical, spiritual, chemical and natural) which are quite different from those which affect Middlemarch (historical, social and political). Almost all the critical commentary on *Weymouth Sands* remarks on the sense of place. However, there are surprisingly few attempts to interpret the entire novel. It is easy enough to read Powys's statement, accept it, and then move on.

Powys's friend, G. Wilson Knight, is one critic who follows Powys's cue about the novel. David A. Cook, however, objects to his description of *Weymouth Sands* as a happy book. "The whole purpose here," he writes, "is to show that *despite* the terrific vitalizing power of [sun, stone, and sea], they can no longer redeem in a world gone mad with arbitrary concupiscence, systematic logic, and self-perpetuating gadgetry."⁴ For Susan Huxtable-Selly, the novel is about the "struggle of the individual soul to come to terms with the cosmos," particularly through the uniting of the polarities (e.g., male and female).⁵ Elizabeth Tombs finds Powys telling us that love is a necessary evil.⁶ H. P. Collins declares, "[t]he sublimation of humanity by response to [the] forces [of nature] is the ultimate message of the novel".⁷ Morine Krisdottir considers the novel as the story of a magician, Sylvanus, caught between the madness of the forest and the loneliness and cruelty of civilization.⁸

From the above statements we can see that

one major controversy about *Weymouth Sands* is developing. Is the novel optimistic or pessimistic? If it is optimistic, wherein is salvation for man? If it is pessimistic, what are the insurmountable causes of man's problems? Knight, Huxtable-Selly, and Collins are most optimistic about Nature. Cavaliero is in the centre. Cook, Tombs and Krisdottir are the most sombre.

It has been said many times: of happiness and despair there is no measure. Consequently, a look at unhappiness in *Middlemarch* may give us another standard by which to think about the misery and sadness in *Weymouth Sands*. There is plenty of unhappiness in this town also. The novel, however, ends with the happy union of Dorothea Brooke and Will Ladislaw, and we can easily compare this to the reunion of Perdita Wane and Jobber Skald. Both Powys and Eliot intend us to examine whether individual happiness can only exist outside of the society to which it owes nothing or whether happiness can only be achieved by creatively harmonizing oneself with the social order of man.

At first glance, it is easy to say that George Eliot is an author who stresses the importance of a life which contributes to society, and that John Cowper Powys is one who upholds a romantic mysticism and defence of solitude. However, those critics who have found *Weymouth Sands* pessimistic have stressed the heavy weight of social intercourse on the characters, a weight which generally stifles them. It is my belief that Eliot and Powys are somewhat closer than Cavaliero imagines them to be. They both agree that love between two people on a lasting basis (not a life of good deeds or union with the cosmos) is, when all's said and done, the best this life has to offer. It is easy to say that for George Eliot society is cemented by sound marriages such as the one between Will and Dorothea, but we must not forget that marriage to Will keeps Dorothea from being destroyed by a society that really has nothing much to offer her, as compared to what it offered some people in more heroic ages.

A study of unhappiness in *Middlemarch* could deserve a book in itself, but here I wish to simply focus briefly on the novel's preface about St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and how it directs our thinking toward sorrow in the novel. St Teresa's story is presented in such a way that it makes Dorothea seem particularly passive and pitiful.

Theresa's passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life: what were many-volumed romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? Her flame quickly burned up that light fuel, and fed from within, soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self. She found her epos in the reform of a religious order.

That Spanish woman who lived three hundred years ago was certainly not the last of her kind. Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity: perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unswept into oblivion. With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul. Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood, so that the one was disapproved of as extravagance and the other condemned as a lapse.⁹

Eliot is suggesting that, compared to St Teresa, women like Dorothea have been weighed down by "meanness of opportunity". Yet, was St Teresa, who was not very well-educated, really in such a better position? She was from a well-to-do family and came from the town favoured by Ferdinand and Isabella, but life as a semi-invalid in a convent really only goes so far—except in some rare cases!

George Eliot completely plays down the fact that St Teresa was a mystic, who had many visionary experiences, such as when a cherub pierced her heart with an iron-headed spear which had a flaming gold tip. For Eliot, Teresa is only the little girl who had books of chivalry read to her and who grew up to be a church reformer. Eliot forgets that Teresa wrote her own autobiography. She did not need a "sacred poet" to write it for her. She was looking for both God and truth as best she could, but Eliot does not really accept this for what it is worth. Indeed, Teresa is seen as a person who was lucky to have a society around her which provided a natural outlet for her ardour. The implication is that any cause may really turn out to be as good as another.

For Dorothea, "foundress of nothing", social reform is also important, and yet her story from her nineteenth to her twenty-first year is basically the account of her disastrous marriage to the selfish Mr Casaubon and her more suitable marriage to Will Ladislaw after she is saved by Mr Casaubon's death. The story could have been reworked to concentrate on her interest in social reform. It is not, and we are left believing, as much from the structure of the novel as from commentary, that it is marriage which really has the final say about a person's happiness. We are not presented with a story of career men and women pursuing their goals as single people.

The last two paragraphs of *Middlemarch*, concerning Dorothea, read as if the nineteenth century is truly an age of hopeless decline, despite the fact we all know it to have been full of larger than life figures in many realms of endeavour.

Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity

of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone. But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know.

Dorothea chooses marriage, and it is made clear that such a decision is based to a large degree on what society had in store for women of William IV's time. Yet her salvation is really rooted in this determinism. Her individual acts of charity in the Middlemarch area simply do not add up to enough for her in themselves. How much we blame Dorothea for not living up to her full potential is a question rooted in the personal values and ideas of each reader, yet it hardly seems to make sense to compare Dorothea to figures of legend such as Antigone when it is real historical forces that Eliot wishes to explore most. In the last analysis, Dorothea's happiness is not determined by whether the railroads come to the town or not or whether the Reform Bill of 1832 is passed or not. Consequently, although there are no twentieth century equivalents of these changes in *Weymouth Sands*, the lack of historical detail does not make the novel as different from Eliot's as we might expect.

In *Middlemarch* there is an underriding assumption that life should be worth living and that people need to set intelligent goals for themselves. In *Weymouth Sands* the characters don't share as many common social assumptions of this kind. They are by and large more mentally unbalanced and subject to much more physical pain. Except for Magnus, we do not even think of them as 'underachievers', no matter what their problems. Nature is another potentially destructive force the townspeople have to deal with. The historical references which really count are not to the various monuments, but to the ages of the earth's history which are connected with various promontories and beaches.

Although *Weymouth Sands* contains

authorial intrusions as does *Middlemarch*, these are far less in number. An understanding of Powys's view of unhappiness must come from juxtaposing the major statements of the author with the attitudes of his characters on this matter. As in the case of Dostoevsky, as read by Bakhtin, the novelist's work is polyphonic. This comes as no surprise, since Powys wrote extensively on Dostoevsky also. Let us look at some ideas of unhappiness associated with Sue Gadget and Magnus Muir and then move on to the authorial intrusions before finally looking at the reunion of Jobber and Perdita.

It is with Sue Gadget's laments that the novel's tragic motifs end. Her awakening to the world's pain is her awakening to womanhood:

[She] felt as if all the waves of the sea did not contain water enough to wash out the pity and trouble and pain and weariness of being alive in this world. (566)

Sue rushes out of the house and cries out:

'Oh, why was I born, why was I ever born?' [S]he was thinking of no particular man, or boy either, who had turned from her. But thinking of nothing, or thinking of something, she became at this moment the mouthpiece of that motiveless, causeless, non-human grief in the world, that comes on the wind, that rises and sinks on the sea, and that seems older and more tragic than all our human agitations. (567)

At this point, Perdita and Jobber have been reunited, and Curly Wix has left Magnus Muir to run off with Dog Catstock. Yet Sue's lament has nothing to do with her having lost a boyfriend. For her, human misery is mysterious: there is a type of grief that is cosmic and only incidentally related to man's deeds. What this grief actually is can not be easily expressed.

We do not see enough of Sue Gadget in the novel to examine how she copes with grief. Instead, Magnus Muir, who is present with her in the last scene, and who is the first character introduced, is someone often shown attempting to cope with disappointments, as when in the first chapter he thinks

of his cowardliness over the course of the day before falling asleep:

He then slowly undressed himself in front of the few crimson coals that remained of his fire, while his candles sputtered themselves into extinction. And as he undressed himself the familiar smell of dead seaweed kept entering his room; and a strange phantasmal Weymouth, a mystical town made of a solemn sadness, gathered itself about him, a town built out of the smell of dead seaweed, a town whose very walls and roof were composed of flying spindrift and tossing rain. Lying in bed in the faint glimmer from the grate he could hear the waves on the beach, and a great flood of sadness swept over him. Human hearts seemed all so pitifully frustrated! The prophetic frenzy of Sylvanus; the passionate intensity of the white-cheeked Marret; the feelings of the Jobber, tossed forth so automatically, as his boat rocked under those dark pier-posts; that woman whose face he had never seen, crying herself to sleep at the top of the desolate stone house; they all belonged to something fatal in the world that turns to sorrow and grief as inevitably as the compass-needle turns to the north! (39)

Magnus's idea of "something fatal in the world" is aligned with Sue's motiveless, causeless, non-human grief". The reader is coaxed into accepting this attitude toward the world since two widely different characters share it. Furthermore, Perdita, Richard Gaul, Sylvanus, Rodney Loder, Jerry, and even Dr Brush and Dog Cattistock would probably agree that life is full of misery. No one counteracts with a radically optimistic vision of life. It is in Magnus, however, that we see the process of coping with grief in most detail. In the same scene as above, we find that Magnus always has one means of resisting hopelessness. He is always able to call upon a mysterious power:

But he could no more catch its real nature or even decide whether it was a good or evil motion of the mind than he had been able to do when he was sitting on that bench in the wind. Whatever it was, it was clearly something that he had inherited from his father. It had something to do with seizing upon some dominant or poetical aspect of the

physical present, such as this sea-wind now blowing into his room, such as these dying coals, such as that bulge of the red curtains, and drawing from it a fresh, a simple, a childish enchantment—the mystery of life reduced to the most primitive terms—that was able to push back as it were by several mysterious degrees all the emotional and mental troubles of life. (39)

Despite Magnus's success in fighting off despair we are still left, in the first chapter, wondering if the author endorses his viewpoint, since we know so many of Magnus's weaknesses. He is unduly devoted to his dead father, pathetically attracted to Curly Wix, stricken by hypochondria, and unable to overcome his cowardice. His programme for happiness is divorced from human contact, and human contact is what this loner clearly needs.

To help us think about whether Magnus's solution for coping with life's trials is endorsed by Powys, we now turn to some of the major authorial intrusions, of which there seem to be less than a dozen in the entire novel. The first relevant passage comes when Perdita sees Jobber fling the seaweed and pebble into the water:

There are moments in almost everyone's life when events occur in a special and curious manner that seems to separate that fragment of time from all other fragments.

One peculiarity of such moments is the vividness with which some particular human gesture limns itself on the sensitive-plate of our inmost consciousness, along with certain inanimate objects. It is not with *every* object in the vicinity that it thus surrounds itself, but with a selection of such objects, which, in place of being congruous with the gesture they are accompanying, are often extremely incongruous. Another peculiarity of these moments is a sensation as if there were a spiritual screen, made of a material far more impenetrable than adamant, between our existing world of forms and impressions and *some other world*, and as if this screen had suddenly grown extremely thin, thin as a dark, semi-transparent glass, through which certain faintly adumbrated motions, of a pregnantly symbolic character, are dimly visible. (48-49)

Perdita experiences something here that Magnus Muir does not experience before he falls asleep the same day. She is filled not only with a type of nature romanticism and the feeling that there is a real world of essences behind the veil of nature, but also with an intuition that the world of human gestures is also involved. It is Jobber's gesture of throwing the seaweed and pebble into the water which opens up the possibility of love between them.

Powys's treatment of the theme continues to progress with variations. When Rodney Loder is sitting in Jobber's rooms while Daisy is at her grandfather's cabin, we find a passage which undercuts the idea of Nature as a spiritual consolation.

It is perhaps hardly strange that human beings in their abysmal craving for some over-consciousness that shall record and retain in memory events and occurrences and words and deeds and groupings, such as happen simultaneously in any spot on the earth's surface, should have been tempted to attribute a consciousness like this to those symbolic Inanimates in such a spot, that in our partial fancy we conceive of as fumbling their way to some obscure, non-human level of awareness. But it is very hard for the mind to endow a thing like a church-spire or a plaster-statue or a harbour-bridge or an esplanade-clock or a stone-breakwater, or even a far-stretching promontory, with this sort of consciousness. Thus we are compelled—although with the loss of a thousand dear and indelible affiliations—to have recourse, if we are to satisfy this natural craving, to the unhomely gulfs of spiritual invisibility. (197)

Powys does not want us to assume that there is a God informing Nature, as represented by the "far-stretching promontory". Instead, he raises the possibility that both natural and man-made objects serve as fetish figures which are endowed with significance by the worshipper. This discussion takes place in reference to Daisy's china doll, Quinquetta, which, on the one hand, is allowed to have an "emanation" accessible to the "clairvoyance" of the human heart, but which, on the other hand, may actually be much less valuable. Powys asks us:

If we are permitted by the Holy office of the Exact Sciences to dally with so-unapprovable a fantasy it were a nice point to speculate as to exactly *when*, in the life of an object adored by a fetish-worshipper, this sacrosanct Inanimate becomes animate. At what point does the idol, the stone, the block of wood, the doll, father to itself its living identity, and become—as its worshipper certainly feels it *does* become—something more than the inert substance which is all that reason sees in it? (198)

Because Powys questions the stone and the block of wood here, we must also question the sea wind and the dying coals which console Magnus Muir. Even though the latter objects are not presented as fetish objects, there is still the possibility that they are being endowed by human consciousness with a value which is possibly not there. Just as the question of the existence of God is problematic, so is the pantheistic force of Nature.

Another comment on the possibility of finding transcendence occurs much later in the novel (in August when five months have gone by) after Dog Cattistock fails to get married to Hortensia, and Perdita has run away from Jobber. About this time, Magnus meets Shepherd Rugg, who speaks of "flower-weeds".

It sometimes happens that a contemplative person, whose head is full of contrary thought-currents, receives, in a quick, unexpected revelation, a view of the world as it exists when many separate, far-off moments of insight, that have caught our landscape under a large and reconciling light, melt and fuse themselves together. (467)

In this instance it is the "calm monotonous years of his father's life" (467) which are gathered up as insight. Once again, despite the importance of Nature in the novel, it is the feelings of others that are most important here. In fact, Nature may serve as a catalyst for empathy between people.

Balancing Magnus's moment of illumination is the despair that Sylvanus feels when he is imprisoned by Dr Brush in the asylum.

This is most keenly felt at the moment when Sylvanus is separated from George Pounce, the mad Phoenix:

In every man's life there are moments when a desolation takes possession of him which resembles the terrible look which a dead planet might turn upon a lonely voyager travelling through space. At such a moment the heart feels as if an abyss of hopelessness had suddenly been revealed to it through some ghastly crack or crevasse in the buoyant etheric expanse. And it seems to him then as if, at some grim signal, what he had really known all the time had been relentlessly shown him, the ancient cosmogonic jest, the old unredeemed treachery. Like an infinitely forlorn face, stripped of all comfort, this ghastly vision of things limns itself against the surrounding nothingness. Nature has piled up all her resources to hide the yawning void through which this frozen look bids us despair. Viaduct after rainbow-viaduct have our own hearts thrown across this fissure in the familiar landscape, but perhaps it will only be when the Original Jester himself repents Him of His Joke and ceases to cry 'Judy! Judy! Judy!' across our shining sands that that look out of the void will melt away. Or perhaps—(519)

In this situation, to see into the heart of things is not to understand anything but treachery. Nature is not just a veil, but a veil placed over a void. We must keep in mind Sylvanus's desperate situation when we hear this pessimistic world-view, but the narrator gives us no other consolation at this point.

Then the mood changes. When Sylvanus confronts Dr Brush, he finds some strength, and the authorial voice offers some more consoling words:

At certain crises in life Nature Herself comes to our rescue by a peculiar power of her own—a power that is blinder, swifter, more formidable, than even instinct, and without knowing what we are doing, or why we are doing it, we fling ourselves pell-mell, hugging-mugger, helter-skelter *into the breach*. There are some who call this power impulse, but what it feels like is an organic leap of our whole vital force, something that can *only*

leap—like a ponderous beast—when it is in its last ditch. (526)

Two points of view are presented here: either Nature aids us or else we leap up with our vital force when crisis comes. Nevertheless, the analogy makes the human leap, like that of a ponderous beast, almost a force of Nature. In the next paragraph, Sylvanus is described as saved by Nature, "the mother and accomplice of miracles" (526). He even goes beyond Nature in asking overly clever questions of Dr Brush. This passage is not only the least equivocal about the power of Nature independent of human empathy with it, but it stands directly in contrast to the experiences of Sue at the end of the novel and Sylvanus's other experience.

The note of optimism here is continued in the last passage of authorial intrusion, which occurs when we are with Magnus right before the return of Perdita:

There is a spontaneous awakening of awe in the human soul when a person stands in the presence of any natural formation of the earth's surface that has no parallel in the whole circumference of the globe. (550)

Unfortunately, despite this moment of illumination, when we last see Magnus in the novel his voice is splitting on the song he is trying to sing. Thinking of Curly, he is unable to continue properly. He gets ready to take Jobber's stone from Perdita to give to Richard Gaul to keep the "Philosophy of Representation" from blowing away.

Depending on which passages we stress, we can justify either an optimistic or pessimistic tone for the chance for happiness which comes from contemplation of and harmony with Nature. That is why we need to turn to the union of Perdita and Jobber and find in this action the answer which is not solved on the level of conversation or authorial intrusion in the novel. In this sense we have a strong parallel with *Middlemarch*. Despite all George Eliot's talk of social reform and the forces of history, it is the final union or non-union of the characters which counts the most. Here she is no different from the majority of Victorian novelists who worked

from the same premise. The union of Pip and Stella in the happy ending of *Great Expectations* comes equally to mind.

The ending of *Weymouth Sands* tends to present the union of Jobber and Perdita as a successful example of union with nature and union with mankind simultaneously. This is the point of the famous paragraph in which they rush into each others' arms. It concludes:

It was as if they were not just human lovers, not just sweethearts finding each other again. It was as if they were animals, old, weak, long-hunted animals, whose love was literally the love of bone for bone, skeleton for skeleton, not any mere spiritual affinity, not any mere sexual passion. (565)

The union here is meant to remind us of the torso of love in the "Sea Holly" chapter, where the union of the figures in the rocks is called "god-like, cosmogonic, life-creating" (353).

Jobber and Perdita are related by various sea images, and thus there is a special blessing given to their love when we remember that Dr Brush, because of his conversations with Sylvanus, comes to look upon the communicative possibilities between people in terms of a sea image as well:

One of these clue-thoughts that came to the Doctor after analyzing Sylvanus was that not only from the surface of that sea within us *but from all levels and depths of it* we have the power of coming into contact with one another. It is then, Brush thought, that our personalities emit luminous rays, like certain electric fish. He came to the conclusion that no generalizations can possibly cover the ghostly, twisted, tangential tricks with which the mind deals with its own submarine devils, its sub-tides down there, its sub-reefs, its sea-serpents. It was the unequalled objectivity of Daniel Brush's mind that was the cause of this mental 'volte-face'. (506)

The "coming into contact with one another" is what counts the most. Sylvanus realizes this also when he tells Marret, in lines rather well-suited to *Wuthering Heights*, that they can be together through Nature. In fact it is their love which con-

secrates a Nature which may be meaningless (as has been suggested before in the novel).

'Whenever you hold in your hand,' he was saying, 'a wet pebble by the sea's edge, you must believe you are holding me. Whenever you snatch up a handful of wet sand, by the sea's edge, you must believe I am holding you. I can *never let you go*, even if I wanted to!' (517)

Sylvanus is attempting to create what Perdita and Jobber will have. Ultimately, it fails since he cannot have Marret with him. However, it does serve to validate the position that love between two people, in touch with the forces of nature, provides the strongest chance for happiness in the world.

When Jobber reads *Middlemarch* he does not comment on the meeting of Dorothea and Will, their separation (even though they are not then in love), and their eventual reunion. Nor does he know that separation from Perdita and reunion with her are in store for him over the space of less than a year. Powys arranges the sorrows of Magnus and Sylvanus in love around those of Jobber, just as George Eliot arranges the sorrow of Lydgate and the happiness of Fred Vincy around the story of Dorothea. In her "Finale", Eliot writes a summary of her views on marriage by the end of the novel:

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic—the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common.

For Eliot marriage is social cement. For Powys the marriage-type union is not. For in *Weymouth Sands*, unlike in *Middlemarch*, a socially coherent unit is in such decline that there is little that can bring it back together. The disjointedness of the plot in *Weymouth Sands* is a good reflection of the loose social nexus of the community. Modern life is something to escape from. It is not surpris-

ing to imagine Jobber and Perdita existing on the fringes of it, since all the characters, single or married, appear to be on the fringe, as is often the case in Dostoievsky's work.

What is truly striking about *Weymouth Sands* is its refusal to give a pat answer to the meaning and value of the natural world.

Powys heroically insists on the sustaining force of nature, even if it is a godless void. In the final analysis, Nature may sustain, but only the union of soul and body beyond mere desire offers a chance for true happiness.

NOTES

¹John Cowper Powys, *Weymouth Sands* (1943), London: Macdonald, 1963, p. 73. All subsequent references are given in parentheses. The pagination of the paper-back, New York: Harper & Row, 1984, follows the 1963 edition.

²Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, Oxford, 1973.

³John Cowper Powys, "Remembrances: *Weymouth Sands* (1933)", *The Powys Review*, No. 11 (1982-83), 16-17.

⁴David A. Cook, "Between Two Worlds: A Reading of *Weymouth Sands*", *The Powys Newsletter*, No. 3 (1972-73), 18-24. See also G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest: A Study of the Prose*

Work of John Cowper Powys, London: Methuen, 1964.

⁵Susan Huxtable-Selly, "Mysticism, Trivia, and Sensations: Observations on *Weymouth Sands*", *The Powys Review*, No. 11 (1982-83), 32-45.

⁶Elizabeth Tombs, "Women in *Weymouth Sands*", *The Powys Review*, No. 11 (1982-83), 46-55.

⁷H. P. Collins, "The Sands Do Not Run Out", in Belinda Humfrey, ed. *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972, 205-14.

⁸Morine Krisdottir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, London: Macdonald, 1980, pp. 100-11.

Margaret Moran

“Premonitory Hints and Embryo Suggestions” in J. C. Powys’s *Wood and Stone* and *Rodmoor*

If a single passage from Powys’s non-fictional prose had to be selected to summarize most succinctly the aesthetic view that lies behind his mature fiction, this statement from *The Art of Happiness* would be a strong contender for the honour:

Art therefore, every form of it, is an eternal escape from actuality; but the strange thing is that it does not become this escape until it has taken up into itself the very sting and tang and cobra-poison of the actuality it spurns.

This is the everlasting contradiction; and all aesthetic criticism hovers wavering at this cross-roads. Art creates a new world through which we move at our leisure in large forgetfulness; but in creating this world it must use—such is the mysterious law—no other materials than those provided by Nature and by human nature!¹

With varying degrees of success and in varying proportions, his romances and his histories offer a compound of actuality and artfulness. When Powys began to write, he was far less conciliatory to actuality. Rather, his first two works appear to be inspired by the determination to show how much fiction can accomplish when set free from a too limiting allegiance to reality. The comparative lack of interest in *Wood and Stone* (1915) and *Rodmoor* (1916) in nature and human nature, except as ways to achieve another purpose, makes these works less than fully satisfying. Yet they do have aspects that are anticipatory of the complete achievement that is to come. Their very starkness allows the underlying pattern of Powys’s methods to show forth in clear relief at the outset. One such recurring pattern is the dependence on balanced opposites. This binary structure serves as the undergirding of all the works, although it is

seldom seen again so exposed and unembellished.

Wood and Stone is most remarkable for the preliminary charting it provides of the entire expanse of the invented universe. The conventional boundaries of fiction are extended to reach from the translunar spaces to the underworld. Once having asserted the right to this enormous territory, Powys will never surrender it entirely in succeeding books. But he will find ways to make his fictional cosmos more inviting and hospitable for the reader. The initial austerity will be lessened as fuller details are provided about the immediate environment. For the moment, however, the setting in the close range is interesting only insofar as it acts as the physical embodiment of an indwelling universal tension.

Nevilton (Montacute) is described as a representative spot on this planet where the ubiquitous opposing principles can be observed in microcosm. Towering over the town, and indeed over the book, are two hills: Leo’s Hill (Ham Hill) and Nevilton Mount (Montacute Tor). The former, the place of stone, gives palpable shape to the abstract idea of tyranny; while the latter, the place of wood, represents love. From the first pages, the author insists that these two hills are participants in an invisible struggle between two mythologies. At every level of this invented world from zenith to nadir, there is an ongoing conflict between the balanced opposites of malevolent and benign forces. Involved in the mythology of power at one extreme are the sun, the element of earth, and stone. The moon, the element of water, and wood are engaged on the other side as supporters of sacrifice.

The claim that particular places are invol-

ved somehow in cosmic strife recurs throughout Powys's fiction. So too does the attribution of personalities or metaphorical values. Glastonbury Tor and Wirral Hill are, for example, made to engage in a similar kind of tension between pagan and Christian associations. Maiden Castle is alleged to contain primal forces that, were they ever to be unleashed, would threaten the Roman-British civilization of Dorchester. What is different is that eventually the symbolic level is reached by a much more detailed presentation of the physical features and the history of a place. Moreover, this refinement of the portrayal is accomplished without any loss of the original poetic intensity. To draw attention to this change is not to imply that intangible qualities are assigned with complete arbitrariness even in *Wood and Stone*. The discovery of the Holy Rood of Waltham at Nevilton Mount makes the attribution of Christian virtues and the symbol of wood to the hill itself not without a degree of poetic logic. So too, the commercial exploitation of the stone of Leo's Hill allows it to function as a repository of unregenerate capitalism and paganism.

Powys retains in his early fiction the habit acquired in composing poetry of relying on the juxtaposition of contrasts and complements. He brings to the fictional form the tendency to think of scenery, people and events as if they were images in poetry to be manipulated into patterns. While this practice can certainly be made quite compatible to the narrative mode, it creates very severe effects in the beginning when it is used with sketchy portraits of places and people. In the first book, the symbols of wood and stone are made so paramount that they control the presentation of the characters as well as the landscape. Almost all the characters are forced to divide themselves neatly according to their general function as apparent weaklings (or people of wood) and harsh masters (or people of stone). A single obdurate villain, Mortimer Romer, holds the entire community of Nevilton in thralldom by his diabolical contact with the principle of evil in the universe. He prepares the way for other characters like Urquhart,

Philip Crow, Dog Cattistock and Dr Brush who are able to hold their communities in captivity. No one would ever wish to trade these people for Mortimer Romer's portrayal. But the corollary of the adoption of the new cosmology that gives rise to the later characters is that the early view of villainy becomes ambiguous. Deriving directly from his theory, first worked out fully in *Wolf Solent*, that the First Cause unifies in its own nature the opposites of divinity and diabolism is the conception of people as morally mixed instead of monolithic. The abrogation of the Devil from Powys's universe means that Philip Crow can be only a temporal power. He contrasts with Romer, whose political and economic tyranny derives horrifying strength from his cosmic analogues in cruelty. Instead, Philip's greatest sins are distinctively human ones like excessive materialism, narrow pragmatism and unjustifiable arrogance. Granted, in his own secret thoughts, he admits that he could countenance the elimination of all the citizens of Glastonbury with equanimity, if better workers could be found to replace them. But he takes no action to achieve the purge he dreams of because he is too practical to imagine that ideal replacements could ever be found.

The examination of the political and economic dimensions of Romer's power calls for an enormous cast. The result is the dispersal of interest over a large group of stylized characters. Eventually in *A Glastonbury Romance*, the work that is most directly affiliated to *Wood and Stone*, Powys accomplishes admirably his original aspiration to bring an entire community to life. Having by then refined the art of character portrayal completely, he is able to make even the least important citizens of Glastonbury intricate individuals. But in *Wood and Stone*, even the major characters are virtually one-dimensional. The main narrative thread of *Wood and Stone* is concerned with the private, rather than the public, manifestations of dominance. Specifically, Romer's efforts to subjugate his niece, Lacrima, is the central concern.

In the unfolding of this scheme, and

indeed all the others too, the necessity to present human motivation in a credible way is obviated by the assumption that people are led to act as they do by forces that are beyond their comprehension. If the reader wonders, for example, why Romer, “the manipulator of far-flung financial intrigues, the ambitious politician, the formidable captain of industry,”² would expend so much effort to gain supremacy over Lacrima, the following explanation is offered:

Vast unfathomable tides of cosmic conflict drive us all backwards and forwards; and if under the ascendance of Sirius in the track of the Sun, the master of Nevilton found himself devoting more energy to the humiliation of his daughter’s companion than to his election to the British Parliament, one can only remember that both of them—the strong and the weak—were merely puppets and pawns of elemental forces, compared with which, he as well as she, was as chaff before the wind. (364)

This passage makes clear that personality in *Wood and Stone* has been dwarfed by the book’s enormous context. Considered abstractly, apart from their fictional contexts, the cosmological assertions of both *Wood and Stone* and *Glastonbury Romance* are probably equally debatable, or even equally dubious. Only from their manifestations in the lives of individuals can either system hope to acquire force. In *Wood and Stone*, the characters seem nakedly archetypal because value is attributed to the human sphere as the epitome of the entire universe of mortal strife, rather than for its own intrinsic interest. In Powys’s mature work, as characters become amplified enough to belong in such a context, human situations will acquire momentousness by their participation in vast universal patterns. Then the notion of the individual level as a reflection of vast cosmic transactions becomes more acceptable with characters substantial enough to sustain this assertion. Eventually, the characters are even allowed to formulate their own cosmological system. Whereas the individuals in *Wood and Stone* cannot do otherwise than to take sides according to

their fated predilection for good or evil, later characters have at least the illusion of independence. In practice, the most memorable world views evolved by these individuals are, in essence, not very different from that insisted upon by the author here. Wolf Solent and Owen Evans, for example, see themselves functioning within a bifurcated universe. But the observation of this continuity should not obscure the remarkable advancement in the conception of character. If *Wood and Stone* is a manifesto declaring the author’s right to create a heterocosm to be entered and judged on its own merits and self-consistency, later works go much further by endowing individuals within that fictive world with this same creative privilege.

In the first book, however, the characters are overwhelmed by their macrocosmic setting and absorbed by the elemental symbolism. Between Romer and the stone of Leo’s Hill, there is “an illimitable affinity” (373), and his daughter Gladys is spoken of as the child of sandstone or a “Sun-child” (239). Romer’s brother-in-law, Goring, is equated with clay because earth is imagined to be allied directly to stone. On the other side, Lacrima is water, or “the tears that wash away all these things” (722), and Quincunx and James Andersen are wood. In a climactic episode at Caesar’s Quarry, James becomes the literal victim of stone by dashing his head against the quarry side as he falls to his death. This act propitiates stone’s adamantine demand for a martyr so that a causal connection is made to exist between his self-sacrifice and the subsequent salvation of the other long-suffering people of wood. The symbolism is made so dominant as to dictate even the direction of the plot.

Almost everyone is given a name that draws immediate attention to his most important attributes. Mortimer Romer illustrates the deadly constraints imposed by absolute power such as that of the imperial Augustus. His daughter, the happy but cruel Gladys, torments her cousin, the sad but kindly Lacrima. Quincunx’s odd name stresses the submissiveness of a man so inert

as virtually to be wood; moreover wood in a precisely arranged grouping. Dangelis, James and Luke oppose Romer's paganism by their adherence to the altruistic ethics of Christianity. The last two, the Andersen brothers, also have a special connection through their surname to the fairy-tale realm. In other instances, names are assigned that are at least idiosyncratic, if not so clearly allegorical. Such is the case with Taxater, Wone or Ninsy.

Even when Powys comes in later works to portray his people much more fully, he retains to a surprising extent the practice of using names that are so odd or emblematic as to suggest unreal or one-dimensional characters. There will be names chosen for meaning (like Ashover, Perdita Wane, Old Funky, Lovie, and Dud No-man) and plenty that are simply peculiar (like Gerda Torp or Curly Wix). Some—like Powys's own name—are designations that people share with geographical features (like Solent, Wye or Zoyland). There are a great many taken from the natural world (like Stork, Rook, Malakite and Daisy Lily). The technique is startling when it is applied to major characters because novelistic precedent encourages such designations for minor figures, but the serious characters are normally given more plausible names. In *Maiden Castle*, names acquire even greater importance than ever because people are allowed actually to define themselves by selecting their own names. Here, then, is another indication of the complexity of the characters in the mature works. If some people are intricate enough to share with the author the privilege of cosmos-building, others are sufficiently emancipated as to create themselves.

In *Wood and Stone*, Powys requires human characters of polarized types and a multidimensional world in order to test Nietzsche's theory that the laws of the universe support the Superman. Only in this way, can the reader be challenged to decide whether the planetary arrangement is more favourable to the weak, to the strong, or to those who have made "some subtle and difficult reconciliation"³ between these two

extremes. Although it is clear enough that Powys's own sympathies are against the Superman, he tries to avoid overt moralizing so that all possibilities remain worth considering. In particular, the resolution of the story shows his tentativeness. While the weak characters are allowed to escape Romer's tyranny, his wickedness is undiminished and unpunished. It is possible to conclude that the morally mixed characters, like Luke Andersen and Taxater, are most accommodated to the ambiguities of life in Nevilton, for they have internalized the ethical dualism of their world.

Since the narrative grapples with "one of the most absorbing and difficult problems of our age,"⁴ it has a central idea that is always clearly in evidence. Lest the point be missed in the narrative itself, the "philosophical" preface is included to set forth explicitly the major issues and intentions. Never again until *Morwyn* (1937) will a book be given such a strong thematic emphasis. However, *Morwyn* is actually far more peremptory in tone than *Wood and Stone*, and it is Powys's only work that can be accused of heavy-handed moralizing. Powys tends to use the term philosophy to mean the cumulative wisdom of the ages that can ease the suffering of the individual's lot, rather than any structured ideology. If there is an unusually strong sense of regimentation in *Wood and Stone*, this arises more from the single-mindedness with which the topic of domination is examined from every possible angle, rather than from too much sentimentousness.

If the personal fictive world created in *Wood and Stone* might have been erected initially as a way to answer Nietzsche, it proved immediately to have some purely literary value. The invented world picture allows for the establishment of the dramatic clash between opposites. Moreover, the cosmography is compatible with the idea that a great deal lies beyond the personal realm in the translunar and subterranean spheres. These are enduring and distinctive features of Powysian work.

For all its differences from *Wood and*

Stone, Rodmoor relies on this binary system and it also creates the impression of being on the verge of breaking through the confines of the human world to another remote zone. By dedicating the book "TO THE SPIRIT OF EMILY BRONTE", the author draws immediate attention to a literary progenitor who set a precedent for stretching the limits of the conventional novel to include the unrealistic plane. Because the honour is bestowed on Brontë *qua* wraith, the inscription tells the reader before the story is even begun to expect therein an unabashed acknowledgement of supernatural powers. Indeed, such expectations are fulfilled in the featuring of visions, ghostly visitations, witchcraft, omens, spells and the malignant operation of Fate.

In its own way, then, *Rodmoor* is as insistent on its own fictitiousness as *Wood and Stone*. The two works share the same stylized use of landscape and characters as illustrations for a central abstract dualism. In *Rodmoor*, the major tension is between the forces of creation and those of destruction, with the elemental antagonism between earth and water serving as the symbol for this opposition. Essentially, land is seen here as the comfortable home for man; while the sea functions as the dangerous but irresistible unknown realm. On the human level, the primary source of tension comes from the rivalry between Nance Herrick, who is associated with the regenerative forces of earth, and Philippa Renshaw, the "furtive child of marsh and sea".⁵ Pulled between the two is the central character, Adrian Sorio. Although he is at first attracted to Nance because of her power to restore him to normality, the fatal fascination of Philippa soon proves irresistible. In the end, he drowns with her in the Rodmoor sea.

The conflict between earth and water is made manifest by the setting of the story in a coastal town on the North Sea. Having suffered "ages of tidal malice" (361) from the steadily encroaching water, Rodmoor is a sea-blighted place where sanity and permanence are said to be under constant siege. Although the events of the book are

always given against the natural backdrop of fens, grey sand dunes, marshes, and sea, the place is not made rich in particularized details. Much less sharply focused than even the places in *Wood and Stone*, the setting is used almost exclusively to create a desolate ambience appropriate for a village poised tenuously between life and death. The assumption on the part of both author and central character is that Rodmoor's atmosphere is completely incompatible with realism. Adrian Sorio says: "Where on earth else, could a man find it so hard to collect his thoughts and look at things as they are?" (62) This is a sentiment that will be echoed by other Powysian heroes as they find themselves disoriented in their turn by the unfamiliarity of a new, dreamlike environment. It is very typical of the author to begin a work with an arrival so that a character's movement into a world may parallel the reader's own initiation. However, in later books, the paradox is stressed that while the experience of dislocation may make a place seem phantasmal, it also simultaneously makes perception more acute and realities sharper. Eventually the need felt here to make a choice between a veracious or a symbolic use of landscape will resolve itself into a realization that the two are not mutually exclusive.

The lack of specificity in the treatment of the setting of *Rodmoor* may be partially attributable to the fact that Powys has not yet found a "home" for his fiction. *Rodmoor* is unusual among the books written before 1937 in being placed outside of Wessex. (The other exceptions are *After My Fashion*, set in Sussex and New York City, and the introductory chapters of *A Glastonbury Romance*, set in Northwold.) *Rodmoor* is so lacking in any individuating details that it could have been inspired by any East Anglian coastal town. Rodmoor is endowed with its own peculiar weather and an endemic biological life only so that these natural phenomena may be artificially integrated into the general symbolic background. Climatic changes are mentioned to provide the place with a psychic weather and

a suitable correlative atmosphere for the tempestuous or passion-scorched state of the characters. The sky has an alarming tendency to form itself at particularly dramatic moments into portentous shapes. Even seasonal changes are made to harmonize fully with the action so that the book's overall plan traces the movement from the anticipation of renewal in the London spring to death in winter in the North Sea. When attention is directed to the flora and fauna of Rodmoor, the intention is to show that even vegetative and animal life participates in a dim "half-and-half existence" (287). The plant that is said to be most characteristic of this coastal town, the yellow horned poppy, is the kind of growth that would be expected to take root on Lethe's wharf. In the thwarted spring, some malignant influence seems to blight the normal growth of the poplar leaves so that they are suspended between being and not-being. Silvery fish are observed caught in nets where they are allowed temporarily to swim before their inevitable death comes. When a seagull is shot, it is not "properly killed" (207), but doomed to a limbo existence.

Nature is made sterile or half-dead to conform to the vision of the village as the site of an antagonism between creativity and destruction in which the victory for the forces of dissolution is assured and even welcomed as a release. In such a context, human experiences that are usually seen positively as productive or enriching are blighted. The act of procreation leads to Linda's ruin rather than the birth of new life; and Adrian's literary inventiveness creates a book that he intends to use as a weapon to hurl at humanity. In contrast, destruction is considered as having a paradoxical value, perhaps because it is more in tune with the cosmic movement toward nihility that the book seems to endorse. Thus, Adrian's commitment to the quest to break through at any cost the boundaries that limit man rather than to reconcile himself to the human lot is never treated as if it were simply an insane attitude. If the mad

side of his obsession is never denied, his search for the ideal realm behind life is made to have a heroic dimension. There is something splendid about his reckless rush into nothingness. When Adrian goes to his death expecting to be gathered into the artifice of eternity, he cries "Baptiste", his son's name. Because of the suggestiveness of the name, he seems to be praying for a nameless baptism, for sanctification by means of immersion in the destructive element, and for the opportunity to be born again into a new state.

Since *Rodmoor* is prepared partially to glorify acts of annihilation, the morality is far less conventional and distinct than that found in *Wood and Stone*. Instead of the polarized separation of the goodness associated with wood and the cruelty of stone, the contest between land and sea is ethically more problematic. While there is a clear enough connection established with earth and the normal social values of stability and security, this symbolism does not attribute an unequivocal virtuousness to these qualities. If the sea is made to represent dangers to the ordered codes by which man lives, it is also the metaphor for insatiable yearnings. Indulgence in these desperate longings may be perilous to peace, but they cannot simply be dismissed as wicked. The book recognizes the appeal of the great but impossible aspiration to the extent that its own sensationalism and grandiose rhetoric make it a participant in the very excess that is its subject.

In keeping with these new moral ambiguities, the characters are less clearly distinguished as heroes and villains than are those of *Wood and Stone*. There are still plenty of examples of struggles for mastery by external forces. But there is no need for one overarching villain like Romer, because the impulse to cruelty and malice is partly internalized into the wilful psyches of the characters who are victims. In 1916, the year of the publication of *Rodmoor*, Powys praised Dostoevsky for his understanding of,

the depravity of the spirit, as well as of the flesh, and the amazing wantonness, whereby the human will does not always seek its own realization and well-being, but quite as often its own laceration and destruction.⁶

This insight forms the basis for the portrayal of Powys's own people. The perception of the human personality as divided against itself would seem to invite, if not necessitate, a study of the mental life of one or two highly complex individuals. However, Powys declines to use this means of presentation. Instead, emotional abnormality is treated in such a diffused way that almost all the characters (and even the town itself) are made to share the hero's morbidity and perversity. Thus, the usual boundaries between inwardness and outwardness are blurred by the mode of portrayal. Powys uses the technique of making the surroundings reflect the man to better advantage when the central individual can be made multifaceted enough to provide more variety.

Virtually all the people are made to provide reflections or modulations of each other's torment. *Rodmoor* is made a concentrated study of the extremes of the human condition. On a nearly daily basis almost everyone is forced to cope with doomed love, threats of imminent madness, or uncontrollable suicidal impulses. In their responses to these constant crises, the characters appear mysterious and unnatural. There is no room in the book for calm moments of ordinary existence; nor is there any occasion for tranquil memories. To the extent that these people are given a past, it is made as turbulent as the present. The protagonist has recently gone through "the experience of cerebral dementia" (68), while the supporting characters, Rachel Doorm and Helen Renshaw, suffer in various ways from decades-old grievances.

Since *Rodmoor* is a study of a group of individuals who suffer nearly unmitigated perturbation, the book is closer to the nightmare world than to ordinary waking reality. There are so few concessions to credibility that even in physical appearance the characters are not allowed to be life-like. Qualities

like Brand's "Hatchet-pate" (52), and Philippa's extraordinarily slender androgynous figure contribute to the sense of sinister inhumanity associated with the Renshaw family. All the people are regularly compared to human forms in painting, tableaux, Medieval wood-carvings, or marble statues from ancient Greece. They may even be seen as embodiments of certain lines from other works of literature. Such analogies draw attention to the artfulness of their conception. Clearly, the intention is that they be viewed as abstract symbols or as isolated states of mind in human shape, rather than as fully rounded individuals. The major difficulty arising from this decision to treat emotional anguish in this dispersed and contrived way is that the reader's empathy cannot be properly engaged. We are too close to the characters for their behaviour to be simply shocking and not close enough for it to be genuinely affecting.

Never again will all aspects of a book be made to coalesce into such a rigorous unity as in *Rodmoor*. The multiformity of mood found elsewhere in the canon comes from the fact that, although the abnormally troubled soul never ceases to intrigue Powys, his range widens to include as well less anguished individuals observed in calm moments, and endearing eccentrics. For the latter type, Hamish Traharne and Fingal Raughty act as shadowy precursors. Being out of place in the overwrought atmosphere of this romance, they are unable to flourish, and there is something half-hearted about the clowning over their collective manias for hand-washing, botanizing, and caressing rats. But they are the kind of people who prove conducive to fuller development later. Many strong minor characters in subsequent works (like Hastings, Urquhart, Jason Otter, Malakite, Lucinda Cobbold, and Thuella Wye) can trace their lineage very directly to the anguished people of the *Rodmoor* world. As members of the supporting casts, the extremity of their various predicaments is not allowed to be as dominant as that in *Rodmoor*. The supreme

example of a character who actually incorporates the dichotomies of both *Wood and Stone* and *Rodmoor* is Owen Evans of *A Glastonbury Romance*. But even the saner major characters like Wolf Solent or Dud No-man are always given a dimension that is perverse and irregular enough to be reminiscent of the thoroughgoing derangement of the personalities of *Rodmoor*.

Because of the unremitting focus on extraordinary states which are unable to move the reader adequately, *Rodmoor* risks being dismissed as being simply too melodramatic to be seriously countenanced. What also brings the book perilously close to absurdity is that the style, in its strain to achieve the sublime, sometimes attains only the histrionic. Because the language is attempting to handle what is inherently beyond articulation, passages of bad writing are inevitable. As Louis Wilkinson demonstrated so effectively in his parody, *Bumbore*,⁷ this pretentiousness creates unintentional comedy. In Powys's mature works, his people do not become so very much less unusual, nor does his later style always elude the dangers of overwriting. What is different is that he grows immune to the parodist by exploiting the joke himself and by revelling in his own shortcomings.

This change is attributable to a variety of shifts in the narrative tone. Powys's ultimate success is partly due to his ability to mediate between his readers and the odd world they are required to accept. In some cases, he comes to rely on suggestion by appealing

to the margins of the mind where the incredible is indeed admissible. This technique allows the reader's own imaginative faculties to be stirred to creative participation. In other circumstances, he coaxes a gradual suspension of disbelief. If, as is the case in *A Glastonbury Romance*, the citadel of the reader's doubt is once again assaulted without any preliminary attempts to wear down resistance, this is done with a full knowledge of the reader's reaction to such treatment and due allowances are made. The very excess of the demands on the reader's credulity is there turned into a joke against the tale-teller.

Subsequent books show Powys's awareness of the grandeurs inherent in familiar surroundings and ordinary events. As soon as common sights are perceived to be appalled in celestial light there is more reason than formerly to devote attention to the natural world. While later works maintain the typically Powysian mythic level of significance, this often arises from experiences, like childbirth, experiences that are readily perceived as both ordinary and miraculous. There will never be a complete surrender to normality or any diminution of the conviction that "there are some human experiences which the conventional machinery of ordinary novel-writing lacks all language to express".⁸ Notwithstanding all the important differences, *Wood and Stone* and *Rodmoor* provide many "premonitory hints and embryo suggestions"⁹ of the full achievement in Powys's fiction.

NOTES

¹*The Art of Happiness* (1923) London: Village Press, 1974, p. 20.

²*Wood and Stone*, New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1915, p. 188. The pagination is identical in the London: Heinemann, 1917, and in the London: Village, 1974, editions. All subsequent references are given in parentheses.

³"Preface", *Wood and Stone*, p. viii.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁵*Rodmoor*, New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1916, p. 85. The pagination is identical in the London: Macdonald, 1973, and in the Hamilton, New York: Colgate, 1973, editions. All subsequent references are given in parentheses.

⁶"Dostoievsky", *Visions and Revisions*, London: Macdonald, 1955 and Village, 1974, p. 183.

⁷Louis Wilkinson, *Bumbore: A Romance*, Hamilton, New York: Colgate, 1969. *Bumbore* is a fragment (Chapter DCCCXCIX) in which Onan Sadio Jumps into the River Looney while a ruined privy surveys the scene "unmoved".

⁸*Visions and Revisions*, p. 183.

⁹*Enjoyment of Literature*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938, p. 394; *The Pleasures of Literature*, London: Cassell, 1938 and 1946, p. 527.

G. Wilson Knight. The Editor's Preface

Professor G. Wilson Knight died on 20 March 1985.

There will be longlasting admiration for many of Wilson Knight's books of English literary criticism and for his world-wide and large-scale impact on modes of literary critical thinking. His important interpretative contributions to studies of J. C. Powys were only a minor part of his whole work. However, the Powys Society's invitation to Professor Francis Berry to lecture on Wilson Knight, his early master, was, no doubt, only an initial tribute to its already much missed President. No-one who attended Society Conferences is likely to forget Wilson Knight's incisive questionings and amplifications at the end of lectures; nor will they forget his humour and delightful laughter.

The Editor of *The Powys Review* is one of probably many academics who were frequently elevated and cheered by the letters and conversations of Wilson Knight, that extraordinarily generous and energetic literary friend. The Editor is undoubtedly one of hosts who will never forget his talks and lectures on the English poets, especially Shakespeare, lectures which in the last dozen years were visibly triumphs of spirit. The Editor's young daughter will miss the regular and always appropriate cards and messages from the entrancing, vigorous, ancient [and busy] Professor.

The second number of *Powys Notes*, the publication of the recently-formed Powys Society of North America, carries a tribute to Wilson Knight from Peter Powys Grey (American son of Marian Powys), who remembers his uncle, John Cowper Powys, declare of Wilson Knight in 1959, "in sudden benediction and wild thankfulness: 'O, he is such a worthy, worthy, *worthy* man!'" In appreciation of Wilson Knight, and in affection for him, we take the liberty of quoting more of the view of Peter Powys Grey, and extensively, as follows.

To Knight, Powys wrote: "We sure are a pair!" Indeed they were—so different

in every public characteristic, and yet so ultimately suited to each other . . .

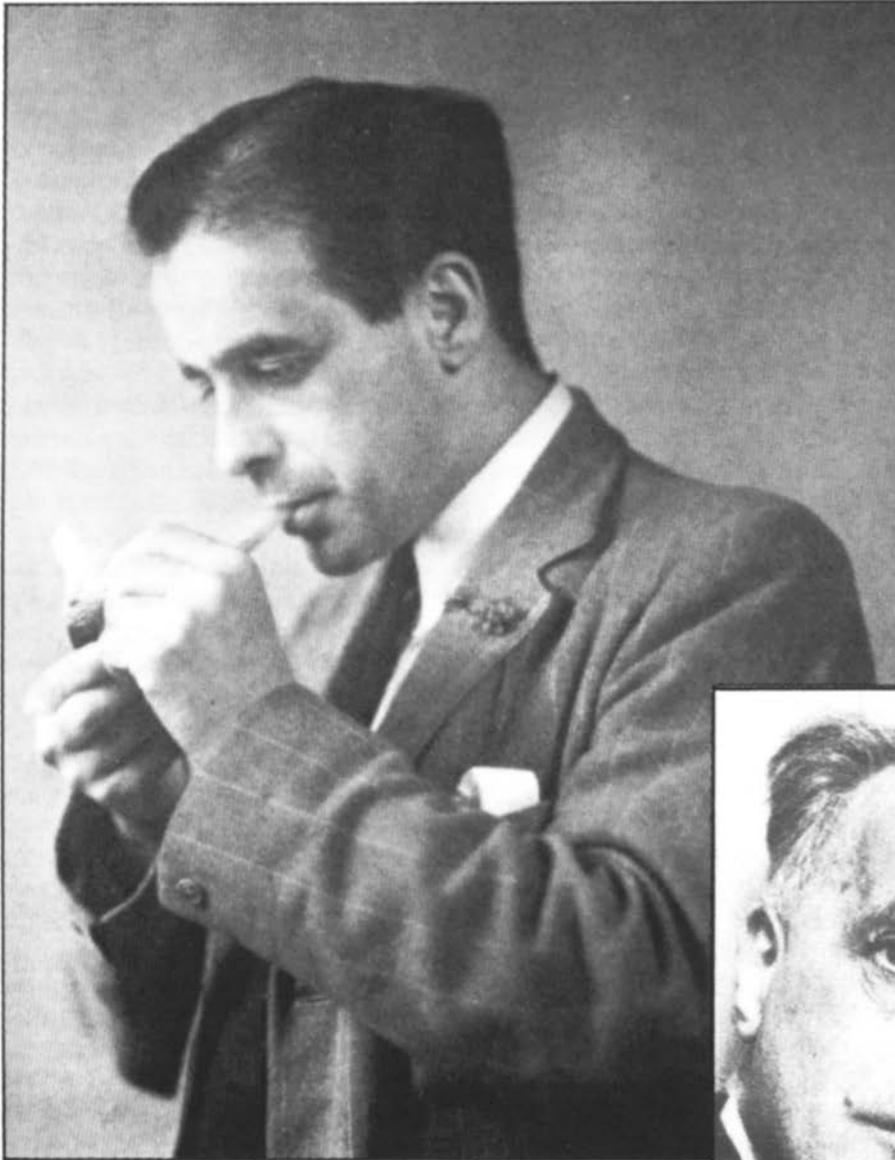
Yet rarely did either of these two great teachers bludgeon us with subjective overkill. In both, genius remained guided by stern intellect, by deep reservoirs of knowledge, and by paradoxical and frequently quite unexpected zones of dispassion. And, of course, by marvellous humour. At the same time, unlike most of their contemporaries, both asserted the primacy of certain anomalous cosmic powers, to be approached only through subjective voluptuous searchings . . .

A key to Professor Knight's sagely discriminating literary writings is his repeated insistence that he wrote "interpretations", rather than "criticisms". The difference is fine, but I would dare to hazard that one discrete and invigorating quality of these "interpretations" is that special personal *kindness*, for which Knight is so remembered by those who knew him. Re-reading his pages now, it does indeed appear that this penetrating variant of "kindness" did illumine and transmute their substance.

Can kindness be a quality of literary exploration? Indeed: a vital one, provided it remains only subtly apparent—a subjective pungency haunting the more formal context of the work. At its best, a disposition prone to kindness in human terms implies a keen understanding of the intended recipient of kindness, which elicits a benign, hopefully inspired, action which could indeed even irradiate the life and work of that recipient. In the endeavours of kindness, intently focused consciousness is implied, as well as ardent exertion and vivifying intelligence. Ultimately, little pretense of dispassion. Channelled into the exploration of great works, such enkindening interpretation can, as it may be illumined, produce a genuine literary agape.

At the 1972 Cambridge Powys Conference, Wilson Knight referred to an earlier distinction he had made between "kindly humour" and "derisive humour". "The kindly humour tends to dissolve conventional judgements, taboos, religious or moral judgements, or just respectability,

into some 'golden centre', as I called it." Knight's entire oeuvre (and particularly his writings on Powys) stands as a lovely example of this golden, sacramental centre, as do so many of Powys's kindly writings to the world. They sure were a pair!



Francis Berry

G. R. Wilson Knight: His Life and Work

An edited version of a lecture given at the 1985 Powys Society Conference

Unforgettable was my first meeting with the recently deceased President of your Society. It was in the summer of 1929. Wilson Knight, then aged 32, was English and Classics Master at Dean Close School; I was fourteen and a pupil.

At great speed, as though not to lose a minute, his eyes blazing with excitement, Mr (as he then was) Knight, in his Oxford gown, entered the classroom. The subject was *Macbeth*. Copies of that blue New Hudson edition were opened at Act 1 scene ii, parts were distributed for reading aloud, at intervals the reading was halted for questions to be put or for explanations or comments given by Mr Knight. What a marvellous way for this one time pupil, who now recalls the event, to be introduced to Shakespeare. 1929 was the year of publication of that short book, a beginning to all his later work, *Myth and Miracle: an Essay on the Mystic Symbolism of Shakespeare*, and the next year was to see the appearance of *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies*. This, with an introduction by T. S. Eliot, was widely acclaimed as an innovatory, brilliant and fertile new approach to an understanding of Shakespeare's art, and led to an offer of Chairs of English at three universities—Calcutta, Hiroshima, Toronto. He chose Toronto and left Dean Close School in 1931 for Canada where he remained for ten years. During that period Professor Knight, your late President, composed a series of powerful, original books—books that continue to be extremely influential—on Shakespeare and, also at this time, he developed his passionate interest, as producer and actor, in the staging of Shakespeare's plays.

Whilst I remained at Dean Close I realized what I had lost in the classroom—an intensely enthusiastic and inspiring teacher of English—so, at this point, it seems appropriate to record a few reminiscences of Wilson Knight as a young schoolmaster between 1929 and 1931. The superb and vitalizing lessons on *Macbeth* were followed by others, no less exciting in their ways, on *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and even—for he had a relish for comedy and indeed even produced, and beautifully so, two Speech Day plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night—Much Ado About Nothing*. The anthology of poems he used was Bridges's *Chilswell Book of English Verse* and the exploration under Knight's leadership of the great non-dramatic poets was no less enthralling. Among prose works he was obliged to teach, since they were prescribed as set books for examination, *Gulliver's Travels* and Scott's *Old Mortality*, but here I detected there was less investment of his personal interest than in poetry whether dramatic or non-dramatic. He did in passing talk about *Wuthering Heights*, Hardy, Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus* and *Moby Dick* but these, though not poems, are precisely those novels which in imaginative density, compactness of imagery and symbolism and evocation of atmosphere must nearly approach the status of that rhythmic and condensed essence of the thing known as a poem. Later, following this temperament-compelled preference, he was to commend to me in a letter from Canada, among non-fiction writers of prose, the works of Sir Thomas Browne.

As a schoolmaster, Knight's duties included the prescribing of subjects for his pupil's fortnightly efforts at English com-

position. I remember one such subject, contemporary with his lessons on *Macbeth*. "Is it wicked to be rich?" was the subject, one involving such moral and political thought as fourteen-year olds could be expected to muster and order. I wrote an essay of twenty-nine pages concluding with eighteen lines of verse to illustrate in poetic terms the preceding prose argument. The essays, marked out of 30, were returned. I was awarded 30 *minus* 1 (for all the ink blots and untidy presentation) *plus* 2 (for the poem) = 31. Moreover Knight persuaded the sixth-form editors of the school magazine, *The Decanian*, to publish the poem. My first publication.

I turn next to attempt to explain briefly, though their author has done so at length, the origin and method of those celebrated books of Shakespeare's 'interpretation'—a word he deliberately chose instead of 'criticism'.

Wilson Knight told me that he and his brother W. F. J. Knight, classical scholar and authority on Virgil, had together been attending a performance of *The Tempest*. That would have been in about 1927 or 1928. Both were entranced by the poetry and the spectacle, and were especially rapt during the masque built into Act IV sc. i. At Prospero's speech,

You do look, my son, in a moved sort
As if you were dismay'd. Be cheerful, Sir,
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air . . . ,

a speech which goes on to include,

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded by a sleep.

W. F. J. Knight, with cumulated wonder at all the strange beauty of what he was seeing and hearing, had turned to Wilson and, almost, gasping whispered, "What does it mean?" with a pause between each word. "That started my work on Shakespeare off," Wilson said. "In *Myth and Miracle* I tried to show what *The Tempest* means. And what those other final plays,

Pericles, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, where persons seemingly dead or long lost are miraculously restored, also mean. They are immortality visions."

So he was to interpret these four plays, and later the whole of Shakespeare's creation, by attention to each play's design. Since each, besides proceeding in temporal order from first to last scene in succession, had a kind of spatial pattern, by a study of each's individual tone and atmosphere, and by an analysis of image, metaphor and symbol, the meaning of each poetic and dramatic work was translated into terms accessible to mere rational understanding. The justification of Knight's interpretative method lay partly in its vindication of Shakespeare against charges of improbabilities, absurdities or irrelevances which previous critics had brought. Time after time he demonstrated that those events in the texts that most annoyed such critics were in truth required by their creator for dramatic and poetic coherence. The unity of Shakespeare's work was restored. Though there were—and are still—opponents of Wilson Knight, in the main his books have proved to be the most liberating force in the study of Shakespeare in this century. Meanwhile, complementary to those books which have come to be so valued by the scholar, student and general reader, Wilson Knight, while in Canada, became increasingly involved in converting his vision of Shakespeare into stage practice, evidenced by his *Shakespearean Production* and *Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge*, intensively in Toronto and later in London, Leeds and elsewhere on both sides of the Atlantic.

What he had discovered in his experience of Shakespeare he was to apply to other non-dramatic poets. Almost every major English poet became the subject of a full length book or a substantial essay. To list a few: Spenser, Lyly, Marlowe, Webster, Milton, Pope, the Romantic poets especially Byron, Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Masfield, T. S. Eliot. The volume on the Romantics, entitled *The Starlit Dome*, is I believe particularly splendid. Knight was unremittingly industrious throughout his life.

It must not be thought that Wilson's departure for Canada in 1931 meant the end of our relationship. Far from it. Correspondence flowed both ways between Canada and England. I sent him poems as they were written. He responded generously with his approval; he guided my reading; he reported accounts of his thoughts, writing, activities in the theatre, his plans. He offered advice, suggesting how I might best tolerate an uncongenial situation—for I had been withdrawn from school early and become articled to a solicitor—and devising how I might yet extricate myself from that situation and gain entry to a university to read English. This hope was eventually fulfilled. Nor was this exchange limited to correspondence. For each long summer vacation during the thirties he came to England, residing at a hotel with his brother W. F. J. Knight, and daily visiting his ageing mother. During those long summer evenings we often went for walks, conversing on literary matters, on metaphysical matters ("but what is time?" he would challenge; "and what is eternity? and how do they differ?"; or "The New Testament is not dull. The parables of Jesus have genuine *poetic* qualities"), and on the development of our respective careers. His remarks were often astonishingly wise. For example, when I complained of the drudgery in a lawyer's office and the misery of my home environment, he exclaimed, "But you should not expect to be happy until you are at least 25!" He was reporting, as I was later to understand, his own experience.

On other occasions I would call at his hotel to join him and his brother and the three of us would discourse with an extraordinary animation. The brothers were devoted and it was clear that each stimulated the mind of the other. Jackson Knight was as absorbed in his classical studies, especially Vergil, as was Wilson Knight in English poetry and Shakespeare. Contingent on his passion for Vergil were his brother's lively interests in archaeology, especially labyrinths, anthropology and Roman and pre-Roman strategic military practices. Since

those days I have participated in many an intellectual discussion but none I think so lively and exciting as those that occurred in the small smoking room of Ware's Hotel, Cheltenham.

Soon after the War came in 1939 Wilson was to resign his Chair at Toronto and return to England, a decision motivated by anxiety for the welfare of his family and for his country—for he loved Britain. In 1940 I was posted abroad and remained overseas until 1946, mostly in Malta. Mail during this period was scarce, letters were lost in dangerous transit, and our correspondence was much diminished during those years. Before my return he had secured a senior post at the University of Leeds and I was to be appointed to the University of Sheffield in 1947. As comparative neighbours in Yorkshire our correspondence resumed its early flow and we would meet frequently in the one town or the other.

A new direction was now taking place in Wilson's literary studies. Previously in his interpretations of Shakespeare and other poets he gave little or no consideration to their biographies. Their lives and their individual psychologies did not matter. It was their writings that mattered. But with his work on Byron, whose life was well documented, though certain aspects of it still remain mysterious, Wilson evinces a profound interest in the personality, psychology and behaviour of the poet. This was partly no doubt because Byron was a man of action as well as a poet and the life and the poetry seemed to be integral to each other. Byron lived the substance of his poetry. His death at Missolonghi, preparing to fight in the cause of the liberation of Greece from Turkish rule, was a fitting, even glamorous, end for the poet, as Goethe noted. Moreover Byron's outlawry from polite British society, as a result of a scandal concerning his sexual aberrancies, followed by his self-imposed exile, his real or assumed misanthropy, suggest parallels in at least two respects with the hero of *Timon of Athens*, that Shakespeare play which Knight came to regard as of quite special significance—as

indeed it was personally to him. I saw his production at Leeds, with himself playing Timon; and almost to the end of his life the scene of Timon divesting himself of all his clothes before dying was the culminating event in Knight's one man Shakespearian acting recital performances under the title of 'Shakespearian's Dramatic Challenge', which continued in England and North America until he was well past eighty years old. I hold that Knight's interest in Byron's biography, especially the poet's actual or reputed sexual behaviour, his vast admiration for the play *Timon of Athens* and his devotion to the work of John Cowper Powys are closely connected.

To that devotion I now turn.

In the collection of letters, *Powys to Knight* (ed. Robert Blackmore), 1983, Knight—whom I shall now frequently refer to as 'Richard' rather than 'Wilson' since he officially added in the 1960s the forename Richard, preferring his friends to address him as such, at the suggestion of Powys—states the facts of his involvement with the great and formidable writer in an introductory note.

Richard says that when he mentioned J. C. Powys's books in *Atlantic Crossing*, 1936, he was "thinking mainly of *Wolf Solent*". He had bought *A Glastonbury Romance* in 1933, "but was afraid of its length, and I think also of its challenging contents . . . I then put it aside for some three or four years, attacking it seriously in 1936 or 1937. In *The Burning Oracle* (1939, p. 292) I referred to *A Glastonbury Romance* as perhaps the greatest work of our generation." It is certainly in my memory that it was in 1936 or 1937 that Richard adjured me to "read Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*, his *Autobiography* and his *Pleasures of Literature*—just those three, but especially *A Glastonbury Romance*?" I did so accordingly.

It will be recalled that at Dean Close, apart from a little dutiful attention to Swift and Scott, and to passing mentions of Emily Bronte, Herman Melville, Hardy and Conrad, the whole of our literary discourse

was concentrated on poetry and poetic drama. The prose novel did not figure in his mind or in mine as important in the sense that poetry and poetic drama were. Neither at Dean Close nor for the succeeding fifty years or more of our friendship did the names of Jane Austen or Charles Dickens once occur in all our conversation in speech or in writing—though the names of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy did. And yet before we had first met in 1929, the year of *Myth and Miracle*, Wilson Knight had written three novels, which he allowed me to read in typescript, none of which were published until one, *Klinton Top*, appeared in 1984, a year before the author's death. It could also be noted that of three books by Powys recommended in 1936 or 1937 only one could possibly be called a novel. But is it? In his long review-article under the heading "Cosmic Correspondences" in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 11 October 1957, Richard—though in accordance with the paper's policy at that date it was, like all contents of the paper, unsigned—wrote that a reason for the reluctance with which some readers have felt with respect to *A Glastonbury Romance*, "will hardly be elucidated by any study of the history of the novel; it is far closer to the histories of mythology and poetry". An excellent discrimination. I concur. Why the book, which I have read four times, fascinated me is that it is *more* than a novel for in it, like important poetry, there is a continual interpenetration of the natural and the supernatural. It is a novel *plus* and *plus* and *plus*. My own inclination is—taking a hint from its title—to classify it as a romance or *romant*, a *genre* distinct from the novel. It has indeed narrative threads, many, but its time, like Malory's book and the *romances* of the medieval period, is the 1920s, 1930s, our present time, all times.

Of its many narrative threads Richard selected the story of Mr Evans for special focus. Evans's sadistic obsession fascinated Richard for it corresponded with an obsession Richard had that was certainly *not* sadistic but in some opposite way related—a

fear of exposure and a horror of pain. For his part Powys, the creator of Mr Evans, acknowledging "Cosmic Correspondences" owned that sadistic fantasies had haunted and tormented him over very many years. Certainly Richard's acting of Timon, where he insisted in the *finale* on presenting himself in the nude, his concentration on Byron's biography, and his devotion to J. C. Powys's books and especially *A Glastonbury Romance* were somehow closely linked, but his attraction to that book led to his mastery of the whole oeuvre.

"Cosmic Correspondences" led to the support of other distinguished men of letters for the claims for John Cowper Powys. The review, followed by other articles and books, interpretative studies, did in truth an enormous service in promoting the fame of Powys. A fame justly deserved and long delayed.

Powys himself was of course delighted. He owned (letter 32) "there will never be another plunge into the depth of my soul like this".

Members of the Powys Society, your late President, my great friend G. Richard Wilson Knight was a genius, the most powerful thinker on literature of this century. As a person he was sweet-tempered, had a delightful sense of humour, was patient, for he had known suffering, was generous, and was unswervingly loyal to his vision.

* * *

In September 1978, in celebration of his eightieth birthday, I was asked to compose some lines in honour of G. R. Wilson Knight. The following lines were recited and the manuscript then presented to Knight at the Northcott Theatre, Exeter. The piece is a condensed biography and the numerous words in italics refer to some of Wilson Knight's publications.

Sutton, Dulwich, office-work, the Army, and Motorcycles, marvels, enemies and sand, Chess and Kasvin, or India and Iraq, Then mathematics, prep schools, and the dark

Penurious days. Yet Oxford. Then Dean Close:
But with the *Myth and Miracle*, the gaze
Into the whelming furnace; next the fire
Itself of a *Wheel of Fire* that was Shakespeare
Tragic. A key. Key book. And bringing fame
As you pursued right through the *Imperial
Theme*.

Canada. Hart House. Atlantic. Into the loom
And fed the threads of Dante, Goethe, Paul
And your own comprehensive parable
Or *Crossing*, for your own Atlantic voyage
Was a voyage of both kinds, like the large
Journey of Dante into hell, purgatory—
Misery, then hope, then last—the joy
You have well earned. For, following a *Tempest*
Music ensues, and now the music most
You should securely relish. Overcome
Is opposition's fury, and the drumming
roll of fear, of flinch, distracting blame
Of those who blindfold struck against your
vision.

And others: Spenser, Milton, Pope and Byron
And Marlowe, Lyly, Coleridge, Tennyson:
Their essence you've revealed. More, for the
Dome

of poetry you've made *Starlit* to make our home.
That world was yours made ours. And as for
prose:

Nietzsche and Powys—you're harmonizing
those.

With spirits of the Great you've made compacts
Shared their profoundest insights in their acts:
Poems of life and death. And hence the facts
Of your own theatre deeds—which are contracts
Between a man and superman: diadems
Of times and place, transcending place and
times.

You have *Neglected Powers* redeemed. And
Francis,
Who, for your eightieth birthday, has written
thus

Is one in whom you trust, whose work shall last
Lifted to honour like an *Iron Christ*.

G. Wilson Knight 'rejoice', as Jack would say,
And celebrate a happy day and a birthday
At the house called Caroline. Your genius
Is now an endowment of our literature's,
On this occasion, Richard, here's a homage

To one who's served rare Vision with rare
Courage.

Reviews

Selected Poems,
GILLIAN CLARKE.

Carcenet Press, 1985, £2.95 (paperback).

For Gillian Clarke the Sheila na Gig at Kilpeck is not a whore but a mothering earth goddess:

Not lust but long labouring
absorbs her, mother of the ripening
barley that swells and frets at its walls.
Somewhere far away the Severn presses,
alert at flood-tide. And everywhere rhythms
are turning their little gold cogs, caught
in her waterfalling energy.

The little gold cogs of this poet's waterfalling energy find rhythms wherever there is birth or death. These late days of the twentieth century have not made it easy for poetry to sing of eternal things, so one must suppose that Gillian Clarke's daring to do so is either naiveté or a deliberate decision to fly in the face of fashion. There is a third alternative, however, and this no doubt is the real source of her courage: I refer to her evident and very powerful Welshness.

Since Dylan Thomas there has not been such an exuberant Welsh poet writing in English. Roland Mathias is perhaps the nearest equivalent, but he is intellectual and referential in a way that relates more to the Welsh-language tradition, whereas Gillian Clarke (although she knows the language) is faithfully self-referent. She writes almost entirely from her experience, and it is her especial gift to be able to make that experience ours. Even the earliest among these *Selected Poems* speak from the particular to the general. A cow gives birth to a calf in a field:

. . . Hot and slippery, the scalding
Baby came, and the cow stood up, her cool
Flanks like white flowers in the dark.

With those white flowers, suddenly the whole experience is intimate; we have seen just such a cow. Again, a cottage in the deep country

. . . has all the first
Necessities for a high standard
Of civilised living: silence inside
A circle of sound, water and fire,
Light on uncountable miles of mountain
From a big, unpredictable sky,



Gillian Clarke

Two rooms, waking and sleeping,
Two languages, two centuries of past
To ponder on, and the basic need
To work hard in order to survive.

There, at the end of "Blaen Cwrt" is the essence of Wales itself: its small size and its large ambition, its circle of elements and its long past; above all, its demand for human satisfaction: "To work hard in order to survive".

If Gillian Clarke has worked hard on these poems, signs of labour are rarely evident. She has a seemingly natural gift for metaphor, never allowing a poem to be overbalanced by an image, and yet getting the "feel" exactly right. Climbing down to a waterfall in a stream, she comments:

Closer to crisis the air put cold silk
Against our faces and the cliffs streamed
With sun water, caging on every gilded
Ledge small things that flew by mistake
Into the dark spaces behind the rainbows.

It's the sensuous rightness of "cold silk" that communicates the experience there. Of a ram's skull found in the Brecon Beacons, she says:

The blue of his eyes is harebell.
Mortality gapes in the craters of his face.
Buzzards cry in the cave of his skull
And a cornucopia of lambs is bleating
Down the fan of his horns.

The pun on "Fan" is deliberate, and effectively presents both landscape and ram. But more noticeable is the generosity of "cornucopia of

lambs", and later the implied glory of "The sun that creams / The buzzard's belly as she treads air / Whitens his forehead". The implied philosophy (always implied, never preached) is that Nature is abundant even in death. I don't think there exists a book of poems today so abundant in its imagery or so generous in its acceptance of the world as it is.

If there is fault to be found in these poems, it is perhaps that there is too much abundance, too much acceptance. Like Peter Redgrove, whom Gillian Clarke resembles in other ways, there is little room to deal with evil in her vision of the world. Of sorrow, however, she is unsparing. In one of her finest poems, "White Roses", a boy is dying in a "green velvet sitting room" outside of which "white roses bloom after rain". It is a scene painted by Bonnard, bright, domestic in its details: a cat in natural association with "pain's red blaze", the least spark of which will burn the boy "like a straw". The final stanza withdraws from the scene with heartbreaking tact:

The sun carelessly shines after rain.
The cat tracks thrushes in sweet
dark soil. And without concern
the rose outlives the child.

In poems like this about children, animals, life, death, Gillian Clarke draws from the ancient springs of poetry without any touch of sentimentality. How? How does she manage to treat themes many other poets would ruin with overwriting (or clever evasion) so directly, and still move us? Perhaps it's because she is perfectly honest and in earnest about *what* she writes, as well as about *the way* she writes. Emphasis on technique and originality among contemporary poets has occasioned a pervasive disregard of the obvious subjects. Or too often a poet, fearful of generalizing, will confront us with details that are too private for communication. Gillian Clarke's poems are private, personal, domestic—and yet they generalize perpetually. Perhaps one definition of poetry would be "that form of language which best generalizes through the particular".

Gillian Clarke, for instance, lists the paupers in the "black book of the parish" along with the recipe for her "best bread" in her most remarkable poem to date, "Letter From a Far Country". It is not clear who the "I" of this poem is, but it is surely evident whom that "I" is intended to represent. She . . . "I" . . . is a Welsh woman now, looking back to her forebears, Welsh women of the past, sending them a "letter

home from the future" which may "take a generation to arrive"—that is, which may reach her children or her grandchildren. In a sense, then, the details of the narration, the descriptions, the particulars of home and parish, are presented in such a way as to belong to *all* generations—and not only to Welsh generations, but more universally to everybody's whose imagination and experiences of living she can touch. There is a frightening (well, it can be frightening) expanse of time and space around this poem which will give the lie to any theory of women being able only to write small poems. And yet the poem is about small things—deliberately. And what is so terrifying about small things? I suppose they are terrifying because they are always with us; they are *real* in a way big ideas, perhaps, are not.

In a sense, then, Gillian Clarke, by clinging to orthodoxies, by remaining a woman with a woman's view of what matters and what happens to people, has initiated a new form of "feminism" which in no way attempts to compete with "maculism". (The very word sounds ridiculous!) Her strength is her belief in her own view and her faith in its importance—its eternal importance, if you like. To my mind, she has written a poem of the first political magnitude, as well as one of the great women's poems of any time.

Carcenet Press is to be congratulated for bringing out these *Selected Poems* at an extremely reasonable price, so that they are available to everyone—schools, students, men and women all over Britain. They deserve to be read and re-read.

ANNE STEVENSON

When Was Wales?: A History of the Welsh,
GWYN A. WILLIAMS.

Black Raven Press, 1985, £12.95.

Wales: A History,
WYNFORD VAUGHAN-THOMAS.

Michael Joseph, 1985, £12.95.

Would two works such as these usually be reviewed together? A closely argued academic work and a "profusely illustrated" popular account of the history of Wales? Perhaps not, yet a comparison is invited, even demanded, by the circumstances of their genesis. They appear-

ed on the same day at the same price, to coincide with the broadcast of the Channel 4 / S4C series *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* which the two authors presented together. The idea must have looked good on paper: two contrasting views of the same events, with the audience left to make up its own mind. Professor Williams lending academic weight; Mr Vaughan-Thomas, a familiar "talking head". In the event, the programmes were more bizarre than provocative: imagine a history of England presented by A. J. P. Taylor with Alastair Burnett trailing at his side, continually breaking in, "... great pageant of history . . . mother of parliaments . . . changing of the guard . . . Bard of Avon". Despite protestations that he was no professional historian, Mr Vaughan-Thomas paradoxically came over as the more authoritative, orthodox figure on the screen (revealing his true professional milieu). Professor Williams, meanwhile, gave the strong impression of a scruffy, eccentric little bolshie whom his companion kept as a pet (belying his true reputation as an eminent historian). The series was described by one reviewer as a Welsh *Last of the Summer Wine* with this odd couple strolling past every historical site and beauty-spot in the country, querulous to the last. The producers evidently encouraged them to be argumentative in order to make "good television"; the effect, however, was merely irritating. One strongly suspected that here were two people not greatly in disagreement but play-acting in front of a camera. The dialectical opposition on which the series was built was specious, and this unfortunately flawed the whole project. Far more satisfactory is it then, to read separately these books which accompanied the series, without the authors being set at each other like fighting cocks.

To take Mr Vaughan-Thomas's book first, it is important to judge the work by its intentions. The introduction states clearly that the author has "no pretensions to being an expert"; his "modest purpose" is to encourage interest in persons "coming to Welsh history for the first time" and the book is "designed as a companion to the series". In this "modest" aim it certainly succeeds, with a product which will not displease the Wales Tourist Board. The book is literally a "hard-copy" version of the images which made up the television series; it is packed with pictures, many of them colour plates—twenty-eight of castles alone. The illustrations dominate the book, indeed sometimes have little connection with the actual text. Charles II, hardly renowned

for his interest in Wales, is absent from the index and barely mentioned in the text—yet is warranted a full colour-plate portrait. The "Celts and Romans" chapter carries an eighteenth-century drawing of a druid which, the caption admits, bears "no relation to reality"—so why include it here? The book overflows with images; the reproductions of paintings by Turner and Sandby, Richard Wilson and Ceri Richards are welcome, but many of the other pictures seem present merely to fill space, to break up the text: Jemima Nicholas's memorial-stone? The Mansell family tomb? In this policy of a-picture-at-all-costs the book shares a flaw of the medium from which it sprang: television.

As with *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, as indeed with the televisual presentation of any subject, there occurs a simplistic visual bias by which significance is invested in a thing relative to its suitability as a television-tube projection. BBC and ITN news programmes have long been accused of irresponsibility in choosing and editing news-items according to this criterion, but even a not-bad historical programme such as *Time-watch* (BBC 2) is afflicted by a similar tendency to be dominated by the "picturesque" resulting in a cruder rather than subtler analysis of the subject. It is an inescapable problem of the medium, one which the series did not solve and one which is shared by this book.

A distinction not made often enough these days is that between "history" and "chronicle": the former discussing, analysing and interpreting the past; the latter chronologically listing events from this past. Mr Vaughan-Thomas's book undoubtedly falls into the second category. This is not necessarily a bad thing, of course—some of our oldest and most valued historical documents, after all, are chronicles—but in a work which purports to be a history, there is a strong impression of "one damn thing after another", with a hint of *1282 and All That*. The major "events", battles, personalities of an era are given, marks apportioned (Henry VII was *a good thing*) and a line drawn before the next era thus begun. But life isn't like that. How many of us, as we grow older, have begun to see our own past re-presented and distorted in this way? One's own memories of the nineteen-sixties, for example, bear no relation to the usual zany, frenetic, psychedelic presentation of them on television (whoever *really* lived like that?). This book too reduces the life of a country to a series of events, unrelated except insofar as one follows another. Despite all the illustrations,

despite the “matey” tone (one can almost hear that fruity voice, familiar from so many chat-shows), this is a far less exciting and dramatic book than Professor Williams’s denser work. In such a visual volume there are, surprisingly, none of the colourful block-graphs and pie-charts now commonly used in popular works on history and, even stranger, there is a single, far from satisfactory, map. Typically, it carefully marks every battle-site with crossed swords, but uses a single symbol for prehistoric *and* Roman sites. As if this conflation were not bad enough, the map omits many important Roman sites, even some mentioned in the text. Caerwent is marked, but not Carmarthen, which as MORI-DUNUM had equal status as a *civitas*. The importance of Roman mineral exploitation at Dolaucothi and Parys is stressed in the “Celts and Romans” chapter, but no hint of this from the map. The temporary auxiliary fortress at Y Pigwn is marked, but not those at Brecon, Caer Gai, Caernarfon, Carsws, Gelligaer, Llanio, Caer Gybi, Pennal and Trawscoed. The crucially important legionary fortresses at Chester and Caerleon also go unmarked.

When the battles run out, Mr Vaughan-Thomas seems to lose interest. The treatment of Welsh culture and politics in the twentieth century especially, is very superficial. A brief account of Plaid Cymru is mostly taken up with an account of the Penrhos incident of 1936. The body of writing known as “Anglo-Welsh Literature” is quite ignored but for a portrait of—guess who?—Dylan Thomas. Not even a mention in passing for W. H. Davies, Edward Thomas, Caradoc Evans, the Powys brothers, Alun Lewis, Vernon Watkins, Richard Hughes, R. S. Thomas, Emyr Humphreys. The bibliography is adequate; the index cursory. One might ask, without sarcasm, who actually buys books like this?

Professor Williams’s book is most definitely history rather than chronicle and, as such, succeeds in a way that is as exciting as it is informative. It stands by itself, apart from the television series, and has its germ in a public lecture of 1979 also entitled *When Was Wales?* Professor Williams has a thesis: that there is not a single, continuous thing which can be called “Wales”, about which any assumptions may be made, but that each generation makes and re-makes its own version dependent on circumstances. “The presiding spirit of Welsh history”, he writes, “has been the shape-shifter Gwydion the Magician, who always changed his shape and

always stayed the same”. This protean thesis is carefully developed and built up in a way that actually makes the country *work*, vivifying it as a hundred pictures could not. The illustrations are far fewer than in *Wales: A History*, but all are apt and often thoughtfully juxtaposed: Rourke’s Drift and Bluff Cove; a solemn *gorsedd* and a not-so-solemn Cymdeithas yr Iaith demonstration; an archetypal *mam* and Welsh women protesters at Greenham Common. There are too a series of seven authoritative and informative maps. The image of Wales he presents is a dynamic one: not a geographical area in which one thing happens after another, but a crucible in which many volatile elements are constantly interacting: the land; the economy; the very different peoples within Wales and their relations with each other, with England, with the Irish Sea community and with Europe.

This Wales is a dirtier, more vicious and less cosy place than Wynford Vaughan-Thomas’s. There is none of that hygienic reverence for the past familiar from tourist-board publications and encouraged by even so worthy a place as Saint Fagan’s Folk Museum. Professor Williams reminds us of the huge shanty-towns which sprang up in South Wales during the nineteenth century—as lawless and as squalid as those of present-day Mexico City or Sao Paulo—where life expectancy was just twenty years. He stresses the stark choice which awaited most Welsh women there: hard industrial labour alongside the men, or being drafted into the vast army of domestic servants. It is pleasing too, when reading of familiar things, to be surprised by new facts: how long Roman patterns of agrarian economy and legal practices persisted (into the eighth century); that the total population of Wales never exceeded half a million until the eighteenth century; that as late as the 1951 census, the majority of Welsh-speakers were actually in the south-east. We are reminded also of the vital importance to Wales of that most despised and ignored stratum of society, the lower-middle class. Both as forces of change and of reaction, the ‘shopocracy’ as the author calls them—the shopkeepers, craftsmen and minor professional people—have played a crucial part in our history.

One of the most impressive aspects of this book is its willingness to discuss things not often admitted or faced up to in Wales. It is greatly to the author’s credit that he takes on this often thankless task. As Caradoc Evans protested in

vain, "I do not hate my people. I like them well enough to criticize them". The unsentimental tone of *When Was Wales?* is set up by two bleak poems by R. S. Thomas: "Welsh History", quoted at the opening of the book and "The Welsh Hill Country", quoted at its close. Professor Williams notes the prominent part treachery has played in our history: Owain Glyndŵr, he writes, is quite unique in that no one ever betrayed him; "there is no parallel in the history of the Welsh". He recognizes how much we think of as Welsh is the product of bourgeois mythologizing in the last century. The tone of modern *eisteddfodau*, particularly the *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol*, he insists, was created by the Victorian middle class who took a working-class event (often staged at a public house) and imbued it with their own sentimentality, snobbery and superficial patriotism. Really, it was a massive translation into Welsh of what might be called "Pooterish" English culture, the middle-brow values of which have persisted to this day.

There is, too, the hot potato of language in Wales. Professor Williams is at pains to emphasize that the "Englishing" of the country has had a positive effect which it would be churlish to ignore. "No one can miss", he writes, "the sense of liberation which swept over many young people at this time on being admitted to a world language of infinite scope". The abrupt widening of horizons, from the Edwardian period especially, he sees as an extension of the Americanizing of European culture in the twentieth century: "In many ways the 'anglicization' of popular Wales . . . was a function of the Americanization of popular England". As a "Dowlais boy", the author recognizes how the "arrogant or paranoid" elitism of those who would exclude the English-speaking majority from being truly Welsh has produced a bitter legacy of antagonism in the south, dividing the country. A prominent nationalist, he shows a keen awareness of how these dragons' teeth were reaped in the devolution referendum of 1979. There is, lastly, the claustrophobia of Wales, "a small country where everyone seems to know everyone else and interests are often parochial, hermetic and suffering". Simply by articulating these negative features, Gwyn Alf Williams does his country a service and participates in the slow process of understanding and reconciliation which has begun to take place between the Welsh and English-speaking communities of the land.

In contrast to *Wales: A History*, this work's

treatment of politics, culture and literature in the twentieth century is extensive and sensitive. The change in Plaid Cymru, for example, from a near-fascist party to one broadly socialist in outlook is carefully and honestly charted. The Welsh Labour Party, however, is not granted the same forgiveness for its complacent and often oligarchic past in South Wales. "Not since the 1940s could the Labour Party seriously have been considered a socialist party", he writes, and that is that. One senses a note of very personal disillusion.

Professor Williams concludes with a nightmare vision of the way Wales might easily go:

A Costa Bureaucratia in the south and a Costa Geriatrica in the north; in between, sheep, holiday homes burning merrily away and fifty folk museums where there used to be communities.

Early in 1984, when the book was completed, one might have agreed with this bitterly elegiac picture—all too credible as more and more of Britain is transformed into an "olde worlde" parody of itself, a "tasteful" Disneyland on a franchise to the National Trust. The Miners' Strike of 1984-85, however, provoked a show of unity and vitality in Welsh communities few would have thought possible any longer. Across barriers of language, geography, politics and class there was an unprecedented rallying around the South Wales miners. It was, ironically, a Tory government which united and radicalized the Welsh as no one else could have done. We are now, it seems, in a period described by that most ancient and malevolent of Chinese curses, "May you live in interesting times". For an understanding of "interesting times" past and present in Wales, one could do no better than turn to this excellent book.

PAUL BENNETT MORGAN

Paddock Calls,
JOHN COWPER POWYS.

Greymitre Books, 1984.

In his introduction to what is possibly—excepting a dramatization of Dostoevsky's "The Idiot"—John Cowper Powys's only surviving play, Charles Lock makes a bold claim. In any assessment of Powys's achievement, he says,

“this play will have to figure, not as an oddity that compromises the novels but, rather, as an accomplished and major work that adds to Powys’s stature”.

Apart from its rather tendentious urgency, the statement has a compression of assertions and assumptions which do not rest easily together. There is no reason why the potential “oddity” of the piece should “compromise” Powys’s novels, or any other aspect of his work, any more than the novels of Henry James are reduced by his “dramatic” writings. *Paddock Calls* is certainly a further token of Powys’s variety; whether it will be regarded as “accomplished” and “major” and as adding to his “stature” remains to be seen. My own view is that it will not.

The subject of Powys’s early relationship with drama is, unfortunately, a nebulous one and it is difficult to build a detailed or convincing picture of his real involvement with the theatre. We have relatively little to go on, and what we have tends to confusion. Thus Charles Lock states at one point that “For the next ten years (i.e. 1913-1923)—years of extremely demanding lecturing—drama was as important to Powys as fiction”, and a little later that “Between 1917 and the summer of 1920 we hear from Powys very little about play-writing”.

Apart from the demands of lecturing, these ten years also saw the writing of the novels *Wood And Stone*, *Rodmoor* and *After My Fashion*, as well as the “philosophical” works *The War and Culture*, *The Complex Vision*, *The Art of Happiness* and *Psychoanalysis And Morality*. We do not know exactly how important drama was to Powys at this time, despite incidental enthusiasm in letters. We do not know how many plays he wrote, nor their titles or subject-matter; still less their quality.

Given the unsatisfying (though nonetheless credible) explanation that Powys’s interest in the theatre ceased abruptly in 1923 when a pending production of *Paddock Calls* was prevented by a dispute between the play’s commissioner and the theatre patron; given that “the limit of his success as a produced playwright” was a three-performance run in New York in 1922 of his dramatization of “The Idiot” (the novel already an established “classic”); given, further, that Maurice Browne, who after all had made the Little Theatre a “success”, was John Cowper’s “intimate friend”: is it not a little grudging to refer accusingly to “Browne’s behaviour” in rejecting each of the five or six unknown plays which Powys submitted between 1913 and 1917?

Were we to credit Browne with a modicum of critical intelligence we might conclude that Powys’s plays were at most indifferent in quality and that Powys himself was merely acknowledging his capacity for aberrant infatuation when he suggests in his *Autobiography* that writing for the theatre was, as Charles Lock a little sceptically puts it, “a minor diversion from the main business of becoming a novelist”.

Minor diversion or not, it is John Cowper himself, in a letter to Llewelyn, who invites comparison of *Paddock Calls* with *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*—“those Ibsen things”—and the invitation is rather rash (Ibsen generally produced a play every two years; Powys apparently dashed this one off in three weeks, in September 1922).

Charles Lock notes a similarity in the establishment of an off-stage location at the beginning of both *Paddock Calls* and *Rosmersholm* as “the centre of significance”. But a telling difference is ignored. In *Paddock Calls* the nursery from which Lady Sark can see the sea—the sea in which Undine Paddock is drowned (already a tenuous link)—is just one of several off-stage rooms to which characters retire. It is not felt to have particular narrative or psychological significance. The sea, admittedly, has a strong invisible presence, but it is not particularized; there are references to the beach, to storms, shipwrecks, seaweed-covered rocks, but no actual spot is seen as a “focus of the action”.

In *Rosmersholm*, in contrast, we can immediately “observe”, through Rebekka and Mrs Helseth looking out of a window, Rosmer taking the mill-path (“again”) and, more significantly, avoiding the foot-bridge:

MRS HELSETH: Of course it must come hard for the master to cross over that bridge. A place where a thing like that’s happened, it’s . . .

REBEKKA: They cling to their dead a long time here at Rosmersholm.

MRS HELSETH: If you ask me, Miss, I think it’s the dead that clings to Rosmersholm so long.

It is from the foot-bridge that finally, with Mrs Helseth, we glimpse Rebekka and Rosmer throwing themselves into the mill-race, by which time we have come to understand its particular psychological import for both of them. Ibsen immediately establishes a significant psycholo-

gical complexity, which not only informs the mythopoeic development of the main characters but legitimizes the outcome of events. He is a master of giving the inevitability of his climaxes a sense of dramatic “rightness”, by eliminating the validity of possible alternatives.

Undine Paddock drowns in the sea by slippery rocks, but there is little sense that her death is dramatically necessary or that some impelling principle would have been violated had she died in a different way, or had the action proceeded along another course. Her death comes out of the blue and, whilst Powys veils the circumstances in typical ambiguity, it creates as many dramatic tensions as it relieves. Certain things have been resolved but only temporarily, and a sense obtains that the play has been left hanging in mid-air.

Unlike most of Ibsen’s, Powys’s characters are defined not only by their personal peculiarities but also by their dependence on another character. The play owes much of its cohesion to the fact that the superficial couplings are seen in relation to, and are threatened by, deeper, more sinisterly intimate ones: Alice and David by Alice and Sir Robert; Horton and Betty by Horton and Lady Sark; Sir Robert and Lady Sark by Sir Robert and Undine.

Accordingly, however, this tends to weaken the tragic stature of the characters (it is, of course, questionable that Powys set out to write a “tragedy”). Alice Sark, for example, in some aspects of her nature and situation, bears some resemblance to Hedda Gabler. In frustration her introspection is exteriorized, humorously verbalized. David Jones bores Alice as much as Tesman bores Hedda. But unlike Hedda, whose ironies can be as overt as they like and always go unnoticed, Alice seems to be intuitively understood by her father, and also by Horton, and can always fall back on them.

There are good things in *Paddock Calls*, nonetheless. The scenes between Alice and David, and Paddock and Undine, have psychological subtlety. The “seance” which opens the final scene—a prelude to the arrival of Paddock and Sir Robert with the body of Undine—is handled with economy and humour. There are moments of genuine comedy, as when the servant Durnie Odcombe’s contempt for the politician David Jones takes the form of a jig and a ditty behind his wife’s back, an amusing contrast to his unquestioning respect for the gentry. Or this (self-regarding) exchange between Alice and David:

- ALICE: Please don’t walk up and down like that! The room isn’t a platform!
- DAVID: (standing still, trembling with rage): Platforms are *my life!*
- ALICE: Don’t David—I shall laugh and I don’t want to laugh!
- DAVID: Well! You mock at a man’s work!
(speaks peevishly)
Platforms! I can’t help there having to be platforms, can I?
- ALICE: (bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter—and speaking gaspingly): *Platforms!* Oh, David you’re too funny! Platforms!

Elsewhere Powys’s dogmatism is contextually credible, and memorable, as when the sensualist Sir Robert advises his son, “Don’t you see that the best that any of us can do in this mad world is to watch a few sunrises and a few sunsets without too much malice and stupidity—and then go back where we came from, without making too much fuss!”.

But such moments are the exception rather than the rule. The Odcombes become irritatingly intrusive: Durnie’s “Norway Niggers” is as unrealistic as it is unfunny, likewise Jane’s “Don’t ’ee, my buzzard! Don’t ’ee, my piffin! Don’t ’ee, for Holy Gammon’s Sake!”. This is John Cowper writing letters to Llewelyn.

Allowing for tonal variations, nearly all the characters speak in the same way: emphatically and repetitively. Vocatives bombard us—“dear”, “dearest”, “darling”, and “sweet-heart” occur over sixty times in as many pages. Add “mother”, “father”, “daddy”, “child”, “my little Betty”, “you silly little boy”, and so forth, and the effect is one of almost intolerable monotony. Ibsen cared for the ear as well as the intellect.

A profusion of exclamation marks is to be expected in Powys (I dare not count the number in *Paddock Calls!*). In performance one can tone down the exclamatory, but one can do little with the plethora of rhetorical questions by which discourse is moved along in this play (in *Rosmersholm* people *admit* to not understanding). One person on a platform speaking in this way might hold an audience for an hour and a half (cf. Louis Marlow’s essay on John Cowper in *Seven*

Friends for this span of attention); ten characters on a stage might be less fortunate.

Nevertheless, Greymitre's limited edition of *Paddock Calls* is welcome (one could have wished for fewer typing errors) and it may be that some of my reservations would be dispelled in performance, though I do not share Charles Lock's belief that any director stumbling across a copy "should count himself privileged".

In a letter to Llewelyn, quoted in the introduction, John Cowper writes, "But it is something of a play, Lulu, and I feel now that I really could write more plays"; and elsewhere, "I enjoy this play-writing, you know. I think it suits my style very well". It is interesting to note Henry James writing about his plays in similar vein to *his* brother: "I feel at last as if I had found my real form, which I am capable of carrying far, and for which the pale little art of fiction, as I have practised it, has been, for me, but a limited and restricted substitute". At that point in his life James, like Powys, had not "practised" fiction a great deal.

In his essay "The Plays Of Henry James", Graham Greene notes that out of his failure with this medium came the great novels: "He was never so much of a dramatist as when he had ceased to have theatrical ambitions". On the sole evidence of *Paddock Calls*, this statement seems to me equally apposite of Powys, and it is with this in mind that one anticipates a publication of his dramatization of "The Idiot".

ANTHONY HEAD

For Sylvia: An Honest Account,
VALENTINE ACKLAND.

Chatto and Windus, 1985, £8.95.

Valentine Ackland was nineteen and on the run from an unconsummated first marriage when she first went to stay in East Chaldon, Dorset, in 1925. She went there with a girl who was part of a London-based "arty" set which took cottages in the village and had made something of a local guru of Theodore Powys. At the time, the place was full of Powyses: Gertrude and Katie lived at Chydyock, Llewelyn and Alyse at White Nose, so a five or six mile round trip would take in them all. Valentine was duly sent on this pilgrimage the first morning of her stay, ending up at Beth Car dazed and exhausted, as she had only just

begun what was meant to be a period of convalescence. Soon Valentine too had "what we knew as 'Powys Mania' very severely: everything all of them said was beautiful and wise and true". She especially revered Theodore, whose restrained comment on Valentine's husband Richard, who had come to Chaldon to "take her back", dealt, as Valentine saw it, the death blow to the marriage. "God had spoken", she says, "I cheerfully obeyed".

Chaldon, at first a bolt-hole, became more and more Valentine's home and by 1930 she was living there permanently, sharing the late Miss Green's cottage with the writer Sylvia Townsend Warner. Almost six foot tall, boyishly slim, be-trousered and Eton-cropped, with the androgynous adopted name of "Valentine" (her real name was Mary or "Molly") she fuelled a long-running debate in the village about her sex, a debate too entertaining ever to be satisfactorily concluded. Late in 1930, Sylvia, the owner of the cottage, moved in. Within a week they had become lovers and were to live together—bar a few months—for the remaining thirty-nine years of Valentine's life. But Sylvia doesn't come in to this strange memoir as much as one would expect. She is mentioned a few times (always in the most reverential tones—the book was written during a crisis period) but the main part of the narrative deals with Valentine's childhood and adolescence and the progress of her "drink problem", a semi-mystical delivery from which provides the book's starting-point.

Valentine makes a great deal of this episode. One autumn night in 1947, having been drinking so that she is "scarcely sensible except of sickness and despair" she falls on her knees by her bed "and—with this vertiginous black Eternity surrounding me—addressed Emptiness like this: 'Is God there?'" No reply forthcoming, she goes to sleep, wakes with a dreadful hangover, but by the next evening has become convinced that some mysterious transformation has been wrought. "I suddenly realised that I was walking in tranquility and with perfect confidence; and that tranquility and assurance has never left me", she writes, two years later. This spiritual crisis seems to have made Valentine take hold of her life almost for the first time, but it was critical in another, more far-reaching way she did not then realise, being the first step of her re-entry into the Catholic Church, an undertaking which was to traumatize her relationship with Sylvia far more than any amount of drinking or casual infidelity could have done.

It is very difficult to judge just how bad Valentine's drinking was. She certainly thought of it as a severe problem, indicative of her own spiritual emptiness, her lack of goodness. She describes herself as a dipsomaniac, but the actual quantities she mentions drinking at her worst periods hardly merit the description. As with her definition of poverty (three hundred a year in 1927), one senses an exaggerated response and a readiness to despair which colours everything else in her autobiography. The reverse coin of this was her equal readiness to rejoice. Her easily-ecstatic sensibility was set alight by the smallest things and she was especially sensitive, one could perhaps say vulnerable, to natural beauty. It was this side of her nature which made her poetry essentially celebratory and which informs it with a desire "to capture and tranfix the true character of the elusive, fleeting moment" as Bea Howe says in her excellent introduction. It also, later on, made her a formidably spiritual Christian.

The story of her childhood and youth is told in rather an off-hand way, rushed along as if it had no importance other than "to explain the drinking". But it is a story of remarkable passivity and resilience. "I wonder if anyone in the world was ever so idiotically vile as I was, for the best part of my youth", she says, typically self-deprecating, though the real villains of the piece are her nearest and dearest; a rather morose, preoccupied father, an unpleasantly pious Anglo-Catholic mother and a jealous older sister whose early life seems to have been devoted to making a mess of Valentine's. This sister had an uncanny knack of finding things out, and would report back regularly to the parents, who must have been very insensitive or negligent or both, as they often left Valentine in the "care" of the sadistic Joan and a succession of frightful nurses while they were away, which was often. As in a nightmare, Valentine would be forced to appear to be in the wrong, and, being a scrupulously honest child and always able to find some portion of blame for herself, was never able to defend herself convincingly. She was also always hoping that her sister would suddenly turn into the loving companion she craved.

Being a lonely and oppressed child meant that Valentine threw herself into love hook, line and sinker when the opportunity presented itself. Her relief at falling in love, very innocently, with a nineteen year-old girl when she herself was fifteen, is rather painful to read about, though not more so than the dreadful scene when Joan

reports the "affair" to the Ackland parents after reading Valentine's love letters:

On the morning of the day we were to leave for Eastbourne . . . my father came into my room as I was packing and began to question me, severely and furiously, about my relationship with L. I did not understand at all what he was trying to find out. I told him that we were in love.

I remember very vividly the expression of disgust on his face.

He became very angry indeed—much angrier than I had ever seen him before. He asked if I knew what a filthy thing I had been doing? I answered, No, it had not been at all filthy. It was something very strange, but not at all wrong. I thought one or other of us must have been wrongly made—He asked furiously what I meant? I said that L. ought to have been a man; I thought she must have been one in a previous incarnation—He muttered something and rushed out of the room.

After this, Valentine's parents never seem to believe any good of her again, and of course, she soon begins to understand what they suspect her of, and to live up to their expectations. Forced to part from the innocent first love and keen to prove that there is nothing "unnatural" about her, she takes her sister's advice and, in the wake of her father's death, becomes engaged to a planter in Java whom she has not seen since she was eleven. Meanwhile, a twenty-eight year-old woman has made love to her: "and this time not to me innocent but to me sullied by reproaches and arguments and misapprehensions, but as ignorant as ever; for I knew nothing about lesbianism, except that now I knew it existed and was, instead of being something that had miraculously happened to me alone, something almost commonplace, and something that aroused loathing and vituperation". This affair lasted for six years, right up to the time Valentine began living with Sylvia Townsend Warner, and provided Valentine with some semblance of stability and continuity during a period when she broke the first engagement, hurriedly married a homosexual man, left him, became pregnant by someone else, miscarried, got divorced and had numerous extra liaisons, one with the dangerous Dorothy Warren. Some of her life as a Bright Young Thing is amusing to read about—the events surrounding her marriage unintentionally so—but for the most part the reader is relieved to have her settle in Chaldon, trousers or no, and

relieved, too, that she happened to fall in love with the compassionate and strong-minded Sylvia at the last.

It is an unhappy book all in all, too personal for comfort. Valentine was obviously familiar, in theory if not in practice, with the methods and language of psychoanalysis, and there is a ruminary, self-critical air to the narrative which, despite purple passages and addresses to The Reader, leave one thinking that this autobiography was not primarily intended for publication. It reads more like an attempt to "set the record straight" before Valentine embarked on her first serious, deliberate separation from Sylvia. I don't think, in the end, that it is possible to read this book simply for the interesting narrative, the sense of "period", or even for the sketches of the Powyses and their circle which it contains. Valentine's mind and Valentine's soul are the real subjects, and soon suck you in.

CLAIRE HARMAN

POSTSCRIPT: Mrs Lucy Penny has pointed out to me that the poem quoted at the end of the introduction to *An Honest Account* is not by Valentine Ackland but Mary Casey, Mrs Penny's daughter. She and Valentine used to send each other their poems, and papers obviously got mixed up at some time.

C. H.

The Letters of Gamel Woolsey to Llewelyn Powys, 1900-1939,
Edited by KENNETH HOPKINS.

Warren House Press, 1983, £10.50.

The Collected Poems of Gamel Woolsey,
Introduced by GLEN CAVALIERO.

Warren House Press, 1984, £12.75.

By the time these letters begin the high summer of Gamel Woolsey's involvement with Llewelyn Powys had passed. They first met in 1927, quickly became lovers and embarked upon a *ménage* which, precariously balanced and always dependent on Alyse Gregory's tolerance, could not possibly last. For not only Alyse was inwardly distressed. The feelings released by this young American poetess exceeded any that even the questing Llewelyn had known; mingled with

the guilt at his wife's suffering, they set up debilitating strains. Gamel too had her misgivings: a survivor of one meaningless marriage, she came to see that, even if Llewelyn were able to leave Alyse, her own chance of happiness with him was small. Had he not made it plain that Alyse's well-being must come first? Her wretchedness as abandoned wife would forever haunt him. At bedrock he did not need Gamel, however compelling the sexual pull and finely attuned their imaginative lives. At times she even felt him to be taking her lightly, with the talk of her marrying Willie, if his brother were agreeable. Llewelyn was her "Master"; their roles were set; she could have no other position in his life.

Even so, their break came suddenly, with much misunderstanding. In the early letters, while trying to justify the separation, Gamel writes with a moving sense of loss. "I don't know how it was but somehow our dreams got mixed, and that little figure you loved is still following the horses' hoofs through bracken and over mud and stone and in the wash of the sea". Meanwhile she has become attached to Gerald Brenan, a man much smitten, sensitive to Gamel's swirling emotions and patient enough to endure her painful withdrawal from the Master's "irresponsible Gothic universe". Whatever their secret need for each other, Gamel and Llewelyn must no longer hurt Alyse, nor will she hurt Gerald. "You see he feels as you told me Alyse made you feel always, not alone any more, that terrible cosmic isolation gone at last". With Gerald Brenan, Gamel is needed as a wife is needed; she feels married, a state Llewelyn could never induce.

Quickly she settles into domestic life, talking of houses, visitors, Gerald's journalism, Llewelyn's writings and, more frequently as the years move on, his tragically declining health. This is no literary correspondence: there are embedded quotations, references to a few books read, one vivid impression of Virginia Woolf ("half like a gaunt bird, half like a Victorian spinster"), and on Edmund Blunden a judgment so unequivocal that Kenneth Hopkins must break editorial cover; yet her own poetry is barely mentioned. She writes mostly from Spain, where she and Gerald settled in 1932 and where they returned in later years. Visitors continually search them out, disrupting Gerald's work habits. "He has a curious head which he controls with difficulty", comments Gamel, though after six weeks of Bertrand Russell she too is exhausted. "His

[Russell's] guiding forces are vanity & love of power and to gratify them he wasted his amazing talent for Mathematics and took to writing his books on happiness and marriage, and all the subjects about which he so evidently knows nothing worth saying. But in many things he shows great integrity of thought and character. And I *admire* him, only I can't really like him". Time mellowed her views and the Russells became valued friends.

By 1936 civil turmoil in Spain cast its shadow, though the war years turned out for Gamel to be something of a liberation, a pulling away from the tired web of human relations. Moderately safe at Churriana, protected by Leftist sympathies and expatriate status, she indulges at times an aesthetic appreciation of the conflict; the bombing of the fleet is "very pretty to watch and exciting", as is the orderly burning of Rightist homes: "fires are so much finer at night. We found it hard to sleep at all . . .". For fairer assessment of her attitude we need, of course, to look at *Death's Other Kingdom*, the book (with a preface by John Cowper Powys) she published in 1939 and which, despite its public themes, Gamel regarded as her best, her most personal work. "There is more feeling & more imagination in it—I don't mean in the facts, it is all only too true to what really happened—but in the feeling about them . . . it is the only thing I ever much wanted to have published". The correspondence suggests an awareness heightened by the turmoil around; Gerald writes regularly for the London newspapers and she too sends dispatches, some of which, through Llewelyn's intervention, appear in the *Daily Herald*. Political events in Britain count for little, though her dismay is complete when Edward VI threatens to step outside the mythic world we expect our royals to inhabit. "I think a King of England ought not to wish to marry Mrs Ernest Simpson, or if he does, not mention it. The world is difficult enough".

There is less talk of the Powys family and friends than one might imagine; Gamel, we remember, had never really known them as a group. She warms to the idea of Augustus John's painting Theodore (it badly needed publicity), keeps her distance from John Cowper (always "Mr Powys" to her), and is appalled by Llewelyn's choice of Louis Wilkinson and Ann Reid as confidants. She herself chose Phyllis Playter in this role and for Phyllis there is nothing but admiration; though separated geographically the two kept up regular intimate correspond-

ence. Alyse likewise remained a lifelong friend and we can now, so it seems, look forward to a companion volume of Gamel's letters to Alyse Gregory. Warren House deserves encouragement in this for though not crucial to our understanding of the Powyses, the letters of Gamel Woolsey are rarely without interest. She writes vividly, at not too great a length, about the world around her and her own emotional responses. "She had no respect for the truth", said Gerald Brenan, believing that she preferred to tell people what they wanted to hear. In matters of the emotions, and in the affair of Gamel Woolsey and Llewelyn Powys specifically, how can we be certain of "the truth"? When she speaks of feeling needed, of her rescuing Gerald from "that terrible cosmic isolation", I believe we are hearing it, as when she writes courageously of her behaviour with Llewelyn "having spoiled forever what could have been secret and imaginative in his [Gerald's] relations with me".

Collected Poems comes as a surprise, for Gamel Woolsey gains no place in any biographical dictionary of authors. In fact Grant Richards published a selection, *Middle Earth*, in 1931; "very handsome with heavy good paper and a type I like". Gamel saw the enterprise as a publisher's indulgence which she hoped would not lose too much money—"but I expect it will". Kenneth Hopkins here reprints that volume, the only one published during her lifetime, and four others issued in limited editions by Warren House between 1977 and 1980. How these volumes relate to the chronology of composition is uncertain—the poems are undated—but clearly Gamel wrote steadily throughout her life. Aside from its biographical interest, her poetry might easily be dismissed as minor Georgian, conventionally gilded and silvered ("silver rain", "silver tongue", "nights of silver and days of gold", "white as the silver in the swan", "silver grapes"; "silver cabbages" even). But Glen Cavaliero's appreciative introduction points to genuine strengths, including "the quality of song". Gamel indeed has a good ear and disciplines her lyricism by various technical challenges: the sonnet is a favoured form. Hers is a personal voice also, surprisingly so in its celebration of the erotic:

Feeling this passion in the flesh
Is beautiful beyond the dust,
And men have toiled long lives apart
For things not half so fair as lust.

We understand why Llewelyn was drawn.

Time passing changes the tone to inevitable melancholy, a resigned lament in the absence of joy. As with the letters, the poems relate this condition to feelings of alienation and a sense of loss, to the long limbo Gamel felt herself as inhabiting, with physical passion diminished and no significant other, no Llewelyn, likely to emerge.

This bitterness, to be alone
 When the soft winds begin to stir,
 When the sun higher rides the sky,
 And something brightens in the air.
 Through all the winter I have lain
 With unkissed mouth and empty eyes,
 Then sleeping deep have felt no pain,
 Have felt no wonder or surmise,
 But only turned to sleep again.
 But now—O, empty are the skies
 Because I have not found a mouth
 To dream on mine; a bitter drouth
 Has sucked the springs and poisoned them,
 And poisoned all the summer mood,
 Has slain the bird and starved her brood.

Glen Cavaliero mentions a toughness underlying the nostalgia and the better poems express this quiet determination, the strength beneath an outward vulnerability.

Though you have altered my poor shape
 I am more truly what I was.
 The crystal blown to leaf and grape
 Is still transparent shining glass.

Dark iron that the miners bring
 From hidden caverns under earth
 Emerges still the cold hard thing
 From clanging forge and molten birth.

You twist and shape me to your will,
 I bend to all the moods that pass;
 But I am proud and secret still,
 And but more truly what I was.

A *Complete Poems* is apparently forthcoming but Gamel Woolsey's literary reputation would best be served by a judicious, positively presented selection.

On matters editorial, Kenneth Hopkins has arranged the hundred or so letters as near as possible chronologically, a task made especially difficult by the author's practice of dating none of them. Elsewhere the editorial hand is light and nicely informal. Brief explanatory notes follow most letters but there is no index. The poems

would gain from chronological presentation and it might be interesting to know of any prior appearances in periodical form. A first-line index has been compiled, though departure from the standard "nothing before something" rule does not make for easy consultation under letter I and T. Proofing oversights affect a few spellings in the *Letters*, while in the *Poems* the sense of the penultimate line of the "Fern Hill" inspired "I was famous . . . among the barns" demands "cocks", in the plural. This is small beer. We are indebted to Kenneth Hopkins's commitment and industry for bringing about two further volumes from this not the least gifted member of the Powys circle.

JOHN HARRIS

Emma Hardy Diaries,
 Edited by RICHARD TAYLOR.

Mid Northumberland Arts Group and Carcanet
 New Press, 1985, £14.95.

In November 1912, shortly before her death, Emma Hardy wrote the following brief poem out of her misery with her illness and her bitter sense of neglect by her husband:

Oh! would I were a dancing child,
 Oh! would I were again
 Dancing in the grass of Spring
 Dancing in the rain
 Leaping with the birds on wing
 Singing with the birds that sing.

Thomas Hardy and Emma Gifford married in 1874 when both were 29 years old. They were married by Emma's uncle, Dr. Edwin Gifford, the then Canon of Worcester. This distinguished family connection emphasizes both Emma's impeccable middle-class background and her strong links with the established church, factors which led to increasing conflict between the couple in later years. Yet the lost "dancing child" of the poem is present in many of the pages of these diaries, still alive in the earlier less complicated years of their marriage.

The diaries contain Emma's rapid and rather haphazardly recorded observations and sketches (of which some of the latter, to my untutored eye, seem quite skilfully executed), and cover the Hardys' travels in France (on their honeymoon, September-October 1874); Holland, the Rhine and Black Forest (May-June, 1876); Italy

(March-April, 1887) and Switzerland (June-July, 1897). Whilst it is difficult to agree with Richard Taylor's enthusiastic promotion of them as "fascinating reading" since, as with many diaries and journals not originally intended for publication, they contain much that is inconsequential, mundane or merely tedious, nevertheless they offer us glimpses of a personality who was not only interesting because she happened to be Thomas Hardy's wife but also interesting in her own right. Sometimes she appeals as a wide-eyed observer of details of foreign life and manners, with an over-active interest in food (menu lists are a prominent feature of these diaries); sometimes as a writer capable of distilling considerable effect through a graphic pictorial style. In addition to these talents one feels she was sufficiently ordinary in her responses to stand as a representative of the Victorian middle-class Englishwoman abroad.

The truly "personal" diaries of Emma—those we should most have liked to read—were destroyed by Hardy after her death, the "sheer hallucination" they contained, according to her husband, being sufficiently potent to warrant their destruction. Intimate revelations are not to be found in these surviving diaries; but, as Taylor rightly says in his introduction, "They are personal in the best sense of almost unconsciously exposing some of her perceptions of the world". In *The Older Hardy* (1978), Robert Gittings threw considerable doubts on the apocryphal story of Emma's admonition to Hardy to "remember he had married a lady", yet these diaries furnish some evidence of Emma's concern with class and her reverence for social status. In *Diary 2* (Holland, the Rhine and Black Forest) Emma records with satisfied emphasis that they were staying at "A very high class, rich hotel" (p. 83). On the return from France (*Diary 1*), Emma is struck by the appearance of "the lady on the highest berth in the Steamboat" who has "firm flesh and complexion which *can* only belong to *high-fed* & comfortably-living people. The combination grand". (Emma's underlining). In conjunction with the worship of social elevation (symbolically reinforced, one feels, by the height of the berth!) is a scarcely concealed distrust of and distaste for "common people". The lace workers in Brussels are described as "dull heavy ugly weary looking women" (p. 94); on her descent from the tower of Milan Cathedral Emma "felt fear by myself so descended rapidly—lest I should meet any rough person" (p. 187).

Whilst these comments reveal her sense of class distinction, others are redolent of English prejudice and of the prejudices of the age. She can take a child-like delight in the novelty of unusually shaped door handles or gable-ends on Dutch houses, yet English xenophobia and middle-class fear of the mob inform her comments on the Tuileries: "It looks rather a dull building—& now tells what a French mob can effect . . . it stands at present like a monument of the 'rage of the heathen'" (p. 42). Not unexpectedly, she scorns the excesses of Catholic art: "It is silly in effect all of it" (p. 102) is her judgment of the depiction of purgatory in St. Peter's Church, Antwerp. Nevertheless, that concern for religious orthodoxy which was so important in determining her attitude to *Jude the Obscure* impels her on a lightning tour of the principal churches of Milan and results in a lifting of spirits in Venice, when she records "Went to three churches Tuesday—I felt better" (p. 177). It is not clear whether Thomas accompanied her or whether the following statement, "T. H. toothache", indicates divine retribution for his lack of interest.

Despite her fear of "rough persons", at times Emma reveals the formidable self-reliance that Charlotte Brontë attributed through M. Paul in *Villette* to the independent Englishwoman abroad. Whilst in Rome Emma despatches—to the detriment of her umbrella—an importunate little shoe-black (p. 138), and records with equanimity (if its brevity is evidence) the presence of a "Wolf raging to and fro in a café half way up the ascent [to the Capitol]" (p. 140). This same fearlessness fails her when she is unable to commit the word "bugs" to paper in describing the infestation of an Italian hotel bed (p. 141).

Some of the rather thinly scattered delights of this volume are unintentional—for example, Emma's use of "gurgoyles" for "gargoyles" (p. 80), or the incongruous juxtaposition of detail, as in "Words on grave-stone very pathetic Here lies Keats who in the bitterness of his heart and mind etc. Strings of bladders hanging up at provision shops" (p. 145). In this context, the comment which most took my fancy was made on the Hardys' departure from Venice: "Very weary in train", writes Emma, "severe chest cold from too much gondola at night" (p. 185).

Of course, Emma may genuinely have thought "gurgoyles" was correct, and what I at first took to be a misprint in the transcript was indeed verified in the facsimile. In his introduction

Richard Taylor assures us that "The textual specialist need not be disappointed . . . since a facsimile of the diaries is reproduced in full" (p. 17). However, the facsimile proves useful not only to the "textual specialist" but to any reader wishing to check the accuracy of the transcript. There are numerous typographical errors that one would not expect to find in a relatively small-scale exercise of this kind, particularly when the facsimile stands accusingly present throughout. It would be tedious to list them all, but within the first few pages one discovers "bue" for "blue" (p. 24), "billiant" for "brilliant" (clearly so in the facsimile, p. 47); and elsewhere in the text "fact" for "face" (p. 159) and "plust" for "plush" (p. 182). There are others. Clearly the "textual specialist" might well feel some disappointment. Checking the transcript may be the justification for the facsimile! Beyond preserving some of the better sketches there seems little point in including a complete facsimile other than to increase the lavishness of a volume that carries an impressive price-tag. £15 seems a great deal to pay for a book which reproduces the same material twice (with the exception of typographical variants). On the odd occasion when apparently genuine textual problems occur, as with the doubtful reading of a word from the diary on p. 64, "Saw a cigar ship iron—[clads?] etc.", the facsimile clearly shows the word to be "clads". The context of the phrase also makes it a perfectly sensible reading. Why is it, therefore, given the status of a "textual problem"?

Robert Gittings has remarked, "The tradition of [Emma's] virtual illiteracy, so universally stressed by Hardy's biographers, aided by his second wife, is simply not true" (Gittings, p. 63). These diaries show the truth of that observation. In a period when the purchase of postcards was a substitute for the instamatic camera, Emma (herself a frequent purchaser of postcards) is revealed as having a good eye for pictorial effect, which she can translate verbally. Of the Venus in the Capitol museum in Rome, she says:

She stands in a large recess like a chapel, her hand touches her right thigh, fingers being spread out [*sic* in transcript] naturally *both* little toes crumpled under as if she had worn boots. (p. 149)

Such touches are characteristic but too infrequent to keep the attention of readers. In addition, if we seek an insight into the personal relationship of husband and wife we shall again

be disappointed, beyond a few hints of strain arising from Thomas's impatience with Emma's physical weakness after long sight-seeing tours. Ultimately, it is difficult to say who will benefit from the publication of these diaries. Their intrinsic interest is neither sufficient to involve the "general" reader, who looks for an entertaining and vivid travelogue, or the "specialist" who looks for further insight into the marital problems of Mr and Mrs Thomas Hardy.

BARRIE SAYWOOD

James Joyce,
PATRICK PARRINDER.

Oxford University Press, 1984, £20.00 (hardback); £6.95 (paperback).

Joyce has not been ignored. Critical explication of his writings multiplies at an alarming rate; exegesis is piled upon exegesis. For teaching purposes the secondary books I find myself recommending are Sydney Bolt's *A Preface to James Joyce* and Harry Blamires's *The Bloomsday Book: A Guide through Joyce's Ulysses*. Bolt reproduces as illustrations a page proof of *Ulysses* with the author's corrections and a sheet of working notes for *Finnegans Wake* in the author's hand: the scantiest survey of Joyce's life, working habits, and awareness of his themes, obsessions and motifs reveals him as an obsessive reviser. The more myopic he became the more he revised, the more he deconstructed his own works. A succinct account with illuminating illustrations of the state of, or rather the on-going, shifting, moveable text of, *Ulysses*, is found in Philip Gaskell's *From Writer To Reader*. There are remarkable parallels between recent developments in Shakespearean textual studies and Joycean textual exploration. Prior to Hans Walter Gabler's *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition* published on Bloomsday 1984, and in the making for seven years, there had been ten previous editions of *Ulysses*, all offspring of the first edition. Most students use the Penguin text of 1968, set from the Bodley Head 1960 text. This in turn is a setting of the uncorrected Bodley Head 1936 text. In a November 1921 letter to Harriet Weaver, Joyce expressed extreme irritation at "all those printer's errors" he had found even prior to the appearance of the first edition. He asked "Are these to be perpetuated in future editions? I hope not" (*Letters*, I, 176).

Joyce and Sylvia Beach included a note at the front of the first edition calling attention to the errors in printing. Gabler's subject is to establish and to print the continuous text wanted by Joyce. (But even Gabler's reconstruction has already, in a manner Joyce the supreme deconstructionist would have approved, been questioned by a student-disciple.) Gabler's edition shows that the first edition of *Ulysses* (Shakespeare and Company, 1922) differs from Joyce's text about five thousand times, and that each of the other printed editions collated by Gabler and his colleagues differs from Joyce's text approximately the same number of times, but in different places.

What are the implications for criticism, for interpretation, for explication? It may be that the majority of these differences occur in substantives, or that the Penguin texts and other texts of the past sixty years or so are capable of being lived with, or that lengthy tracts of *Ulysses*, hitherto seemingly incomprehensible—and deliberately so (“Scylla and Charybdis”)—become navigable. Joyce's typographical and stylistic parodies are more—or less—extensive than had been thought. The capital “Y” at the end of the text is *not* at the end of the text, and so on. A pleasure of teaching *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* is that in doing so one can introduce students to the latest critical theories. Ideas of on-going texts, of revised texts, of parallel text, of a “finished” and “submerged” text, of continuous change, are fuelled by *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Both are deconstructionist texts, both question concepts of “realism”, and both lend themselves to feminist, jungian criticism. Both in their obsession with language and linguistic devices provide material for post-structuralist theory utilizing Derrida and Saussure.

All this is a preamble to saying what kind of Joycean critical monograph I'd find illuminating, could recommend to my students to fill a need, and think ought to be written. That is one which (a) considers the implications of recent textual developments and reviews them in detail. For, after all, these days it is only the richer library of higher education which can afford the expensive Garland Press three volumes of Gabler's *Critical and Synoptic* edition, and (b) considers Joyce in the light of recent critical theory. Patrick Parrinder's *James Joyce* certainly does not do (a), and (b) only by implication. The most useful part of the monograph is his study of *Finnegans Wake* which takes up the

third part and thirty-nine pages, and which does consider how the ideas of Derrida and Lacan can illuminate the work (pp. 212-13). Freudian ideas in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (p. 216), and modern linguistic theory (p. 229), are all too briefly discussed, although the implications of Roland McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* are not ignored (pp. 237-38).

Parrinder's monograph is divided into two parts. The introduction (pp. 1-13), “Joyce and the Grotesque”, summarizes Joyce's attitude to nationalism, to Aristotelian and Thomist aesthetics, to the Book of Kells and to the grotesque—which allows Parrinder to introduce the Russian critical theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. His book on Rabelais briefly cited (p. 9), Joyce is called a “Rabelaisian” and Bakhtin appears once more in the final section of the monograph as the authority on Rabelais (p. 241). At the conclusion of “Joyce and the Grotesque” Parrinder notes that *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are “pagan to the core and turn conventional notions of sacredness upside down. Their author excelled as a literary comedian, and was a high priest of burlesque and profanity. He was also, an Inimitable” (p. 13).

Part I has three sections autobiographically focused. The first on Joyce as a student has instructive observations to make about Joyce's student days and the milieu of University College Dublin at the turn of the century (pp. 18-22). It includes a remarkable piece of information. Three of Joyce's closest colleagues at University College Dublin met “with sensational and violent deaths”. Of these (Francis Skeffington, Thomas Kettle and George Clancy), what Parrinder has to say about the first, “the pacifist . . . (McCann in the *Portrait*)” is of interest. He “was murdered by a British officer when trying to stop soldiers from looting during the Easter Rising (this ‘treason’ became so notorious that members of the English branch of the Skeffingtons, including some of my own relatives, changed their names)” (p. 20). Such indirect yet personal family associations do not colour the rest of the work although they might have provided the foundation for sophisticated analysis of the motif of betrayal and injustice in Joyce's writing. Discussion of *Stephen Hero* is succinct (pp. 32-40), emphasizing the fact that Joyce is re-writing his own experiences. The uncovering of the facade of scholastic terminology direct from Aquinas is good (p. 37). The third section concentrates on *Dubliners*. There is a tantalizingly brief resumé of the implications of H. G. Wells's

(an author Patrick Parrinder is most knowledgeable about) comment that in the 1890s short stories “broke out everywhere” (pp. 42-3), and discussion about the specificity of *Dubliners* (pp. 44-8), including exemplification of Joyce’s “use of the free indirect style to create a narrative coloured by his characters’ internal impressions or mental landscapes” (p. 48). This gives way to a rather lax discussion of “symbolism” (pp. 50-53), thematic analysis (pp. 53-60), language usage (pp. 60-64), and useful readings of “A Painful Case” and “The Dead” (pp. 64-70).

Forty-one pages (compared with eighty-one for *Ulysses* and thirty-nine for *Finnegans Wake*) are devoted to *A Portrait of the Artist and Exiles*. The account of *A Portrait* is straightforward, orientated towards stylistic and autobiographical analysis. There are illuminating observations on the significance of sexuality for Stephen, useful footnote references to Richard Brown’s unpublished London University Ph.D. thesis on sexuality in Joyce, and to H. G. Wells’s note on reading the *Portrait* that “everyone in this story, every human being, accepts as a matter of course, as a thing in nature like the sky and the sea, that the English are to be hated” (p. 99). Discussion of *Exiles* is brief. Unfortunately the superb, moving, lyrical fantasy *Giacomo Joyce*, which as Parrinder admits “shows its author trying to strike a new, though no less precarious sort of balance between sardonic detachment and passionate involvement”, receives only a paragraph’s attention (pp. 105-6).

Part II concentrates upon *Ulysses*. There are five sections. The first, its title taken from Joyce’s comment to Stanislaus in 1907 that he was working on a short book, a “Dublin ‘Peer Gynt’”, surveys the idea of *Ulysses*, Joyce’s search for a hero, the “allotted timespan of *Ulysses*” (p. 118), “absolute realism”, and critical approaches to Joyce’s “work of fiction masquerading as scripture” (p. 123). Parrinder wishes to have the best of both worlds, the post-structuralist with its emphasis on the “hot-potch”, and “the dominant tradition of favourable criticism” stressing *Ulysses*’s order (p. 120). For Parrinder, “like a good journalist, the Joycean artist is something of a beachcomber as well as a meticulous designer” (p. 126). The second section concentrates on “Stephen in *Ulysses*: the loveliest mummer”. There is a brief but pertinent discussion of the nature of Joyce’s interior monologues (pp. 131-2), and Stephen’s theory of Shakespeare (pp. 137-40). Section three, “Bloom and Molly: The Bourgeois Utop-

ians”, opens with a minute analysis of the implications of “Mr” in the opening encounter with “Mr. Leopold Bloom” who “is the epitome of middle-class man” (p. 143). This is followed by an account of his character and attitudes to death, meat, biology, his father, history. Parrinder’s reading of Bloom’s attitudes to his Jewishness, and his “incipient Zionism” is curious. Parrinder writes, “Palestine, he thinks in a moment of sudden and shocking depression as he walks back from the pork-butchers’ is ‘the grey sunken cunt of the world’ ” (p. 149). The passage in “Calypso” refers to Bloom’s thoughts of the Dead Sea, “Sodom, Gomorrah, Edom”, in which images of Biblical desolation — “A dead sea in a dead land, grey and old”— are juxtaposed with those of an old woman, “a bent hag” crossing the street from Cassidy’s. She is “the grey sunken cunt of the world”, not “Palestine”, which Bloom views optimistically as a centre of regeneration. It is to great Jewish philosophers and prophets that Bloom turns after being taunted by Dublin anti-semites. He has more than the passing materialist interest in colonial investment “in the Palestinian planter’s company” attributed to him by Parrinder. Bloom’s “Jewishness” is much more complex.

The account of Molly is straightforward, drawing attention to her shrewdness, egotism, sexuality, romanticism and “eye to respectability” (p. 161). She is unconventional—“an ebullient creation” (p. 162). Section four is devoted to “the styles of *Ulysses*”. Parrinder reads *Ulysses* “along the lines suggested by” Litz in his “The Genre of *Ulysses*” “as a two-part performance in which the modern novel is built up and then disintegrated into its original components” (p. 163). There is a passing reference to recent scholarly work on Joyce’s revisions in the earlier sections of *Ulysses*, and differences between manuscript, serial and book versions. However, the main thrust of the chapter is directed towards a useful set of six “axioms” used as a framework to discuss various styles: (i) “narrative is an artificial structure”, that is, deliberate discontinuity, montage—which has become conventional in modernist fiction; (ii) “narrative is like a musical score”, the musicality and “deliberate deformation of language”, Joyce’s use of compounds and portmanteau words; (iii) “there is no objective or neutral style”, parody (“Cyclops”), “Nausicaa”. The former “is the most politically committed piece of fiction that Joyce ever produced. Its message is a rejection of the violence and hatred engendered by two

opposing political systems, British imperialism and Irish nationalism" and "the narrative . . . is a complex satire working by means of a double displacement". This is most illuminating, but not developed (p. 172). Similarly, analysis of the styles of "Nausicaa" and Gerty McDowell's imprisonment by language (which Joycean creation isn't?) is illuminating but brief (pp. 173-4); (iv) "stylistic resources vary from age to age" — "Oxen of the Sun" with its sequence of historical styles is, in addition, a sustained satire; (v) "'Subjectivity' and 'personality' are constructs arising within the literary text and varying from one genre to another"—a reading of "Circe" and "Eumaeus", the former being "a vast freak show, an encyclopaedia of monstrosities lurking in the underworld of the life defined by Bloom and Stephen" in which "chapter restraints are overturned, values are inverted and primitive hungers and drives are unleashed" (p. 177). The latter is "one of sincerely struggling to overcome disguise". The sixth division, "There is no 'unity of time' in narrative fiction" focuses upon Joyce's experiments with time in *Ulysses* (pp. 181-6).

Parrinder's account of *Ulysses* concludes with "The ultimate symbol" in the book which is "Molly's 'yes' and the memory to which it refers—a memory of shared sexual joy, of a marriage proposal, and above all of a kiss" (p. 187). All very bourgeois and rather sentimental. Marilyn French and H. G. Wells are seen as polarities in response to the book, the former seeing in it a "mysterious sexuality", the latter a "cloacal obsession"—"a draining sewer, or excremental cavity" (p. 193). Shrewdly Parrinder's exploration of the kiss symbol sees elements of wisdom in both views. He steers a middle course. Joyce's themes in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are "creation and fertility . . . pursued in its linguistic, dynastic, and sexual—not merely its artistic—aspects". *Finnegans Wake* avoids the apotheosis of Christian revelation. *Ulysses* concludes with the eating of the seed-cake which can be interpreted as a representation of the Fall of Man—a reading squarely within traditional Christian orthodoxy. In the attempt to explain Joyce, to make him more accessible, it would be unfortunate to play down his uniqueness. Joyce was a revolutionary genius.

WILLIAM BAKER

Bertrand Russell and Gamel Woolsey,
KENNETH HOPKINS.

Warren House Press, 1985, £2.40.

In pursuing his research on the Powys brothers, Kenneth Hopkins corresponded with Gerald Brenan about Brenan's common-law wife, Gamel (née Woolsey). In due course Hopkins obtained Woolsey's personal papers and Brenan's permission to publish Woolsey's unpublished writings. To Powys aficionados Gamel Woolsey is known primarily as that young woman who experienced a turbulent love affair with Llewelyn Powys in 1929-30. Shortly after the affair she decided to live with Brenan, a relationship that lasted until her death in 1968. It is Hopkins's opinion that in spite of Woolsey's failure as a creative writer, her life and work are of sufficient interest to merit public recognition. Hopkins's fascination with Woolsey has led him to issue a number of publications by and about her under the vanity imprint of the Warren House Press. These publications include: several collections of Woolsey's poems, *Twenty Eight Sonnets* (1977), *The Last Leaf Falls* (1978), *Middle Earth* (1979), *The Search for Demeter* (1980), *The Weight of Human Hours* (1980), and *The Collected Poems of Gamel Woolsey* (1984); an edition of *The Letters of Gamel Woolsey to Llewelyn Powys, 1930-1939* (1983); and Hopkins's *Gamel & Rex* (1979), a poem written from Woolsey's perspective about her failed marriage to the journalist and miscellaneous writer, Maurice Reginald Hunter, based on incidents in Woolsey's suppressed autobiographical novel, *One Way of Love*.

Hopkins's recent pamphlet on Woolsey's relationship with Bertrand Russell was first published in *Russell: The Journal of the Bertrand Russell Archives*, n.s. 5 (Summer 1985). In his reminiscences, *A Personal Record, 1920-1972*, Brenan has devoted a lengthy chapter to Russell, and in the *Life of Bertrand Russell*, Ronald W. Clark has commented on Russell's affection for Woolsey. So, one may wonder, what does Hopkins have to say on the relationship that has not already been said? In addition to providing biographical information on Brenan, Woolsey, and the Powys circle, Hopkins focuses his discussion on the related question of why Russell loved Woolsey and why that love was not returned. The problem of unrequited love has been the subject of literary reflection since the Middle Ages, and Hopkins is really no more

successful in solving the problem in the case of Woolsey and Russell than his medieval predecessors. To be fair to Hopkins, he does point out that Russell greatly admired the haunting rhythms of Woolsey's poetry and that he was enchanted by her beauty, melancholy, and inner strength. For her part, Hopkins observes, Woolsey highly regarded Russell's intellectual acumen and integrity, but she disliked his vanity and tendency to vindictiveness. "It's queer that I can never really like him", she tried to explain in a letter to Llewelyn Powys. Unlike Brenan's letters to Russell which are long, chatty, and enthusiastic, Woolsey's letters are quite short and somewhat noncommittal. In the end Hopkins is forced to the conclusion: "The most we can do is recognize the genuine depth of Russell's feelings for Gamel, over some part of the years he knew her, and speculate on the real nature of her feelings for him" (p. 12).

Hopkins's pamphlet does shed some new light

on the Woolsey-Russell interaction. He draws out interesting references from Woolsey's letters to Powys and to Alyse Gregory, and he makes good use of the relevant correspondence at McMaster University Library and at the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library. Unfortunately, there are certain embargoed letters in Russell's papers written by Brenan and Woolsey to Russell's third wife, Patricia, which Hopkins was not allowed to see. The story that Hopkins tells in a clear and engaging style is tragic and evocative—of Woolsey's penchant for unhappiness and her misused talent, of Russell's intellectual triumphs and his emotional entanglements. In January 1968 Brenan wrote to Russell that Woolsey had finally died after a prolonged bout with cancer. Much distressed by the news Russell replied: "I liked the warmth and intimacy of her sympathy, which I shall miss as long as I live".

CARL SPADONI

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Letters to the Editor

ELEGY (for Ronald Hall, novelist)

Ingenuity held off the visitors,
like a hand, like a mask.
I was lost, looking at you lost.
Dear Ron, in the end
we were stripped down to our dread.
Your hope died, then we sat together
in silence, as if mourning it.
Walking about, you told me
you were stunned, unable to get out,
turn agony into bliss.
Now it's over. Something with vast arms
came suddenly, to crush
and gather you up.
Now, at least you have stopped dangling.
In that embrace of no life,
demanded like a sunrise,
may you rest in peace.

Forgive me my temporary health
and my unseemly lust,
twisting as pain like yours
inside the cage.
With levity,
at seventeen a bright one,
you lit up my mother, brother, me,
each visit loved.
At a glance you warmed us,
strangers on earth like you.
You'd laugh. You missed nothing.
From that childhood on a grid of back streets,
deeply astonished to find a world
as regulated as a barracks,
dreaming violently, you were led
by mountains. You even flew with the birds.
As well as books,
you read the figure in our carpet.

Philip Callow

It is sad to have to report the death of Ronald Hall, at 56, after a sudden heart attack at his home in Somerset. He leaves behind a wife, Ruth, and a son, Joseph. There is also a family by his former wife, Mary, to mourn his passing.

Ron battled for many years against ill-health and growing depression caused by what he felt to

be the withering of the creative powers that rose in him so freshly and strongly in his youth. A working-class boy from the streets of Coventry, he nevertheless made friends through his writing and personal contact with many of the greatest writers of the day, chiefly John Cowper Powys and Henry Miller. His correspondents and friendships included Jean Giono, Claude Houghton, Alfred Perles, and Francis Stuart. His novel *The Open Cage* was published by Collins in 1970 and met with some critical success. At the time of his death he was working on a vast historical novel, set in the West Country.

The story of his awakening, when a lad of seventeen, to art and literature, primarily through the discovery of the works of Powys and Miller, is vividly and movingly described in his preface to the Village Press edition of the *Letters to Henry Miller from John Cowper Powys*. There he tells how he wrote his first 'fan' letter to John in 1951. In one of the letters John writes, with characteristic glee, of receiving "the most satisfying fan letter I've ever had" from a 21-year old Ron Hall and his friend, Phil Callow, the "Coventry kids".

That letter led to visits to John and Phyllis at their home in Corwen by Ron and Mary and to an extensive correspondence that still survives, in some American university. Ron frequently visited Phyllis, after John's death, on his 'walkabouts', when the pressure of his pedagogical work became too much for him—as sadly it so often did.

I am enclosing an elegy by his oldest and dearest friend, the novelist and poet Philip Callow, and I hope you will be able to find space for it in the next *Powys Review*. Phil felt unable to do this himself.

Ron Hall will be missed by those in the Powys Society who knew him, notably Bill Lander, Jack Rushby and myself, a friend of almost twenty years.

Jim Morgan
332 Kingshill Avenue
Hayes
Middlesex UB4 8BX

In her recent letter (PR16) Theodora Gay Scutt writes to you about "certain quotations" in my book *The Brothers Powys*. Her point is that I quoted from a book "purporting to be by [Mrs Scutt] called 'A Portrait of T. F. Powys'," and that in her view any evidence drawn from this source is unsafe, as she herself did not "write one word of it as far as it went or even read it to make sure I was correctly quoted".

Since she wrote to you Mrs Scutt has in fact examined the manuscript in some detail. As a result of this examination she put me in touch almost immediately with Professor Lawrence Mitchell of the University of Minnesota, who is currently working on a book about Theodore Powys, and who has already uncovered some interesting and valuable new information about T. F. P.'s years as a farmer. Professor Mitchell then visited my house with the express purpose of reading and making extensive notes from the document which (before she had seen it) Mrs Scutt wrote about so dismissively.

May I now, for the record, give you some more details about this manuscript? It is, to be more precise, the photocopy of a typescript, and was made available to me by Count Potocki of Montalk, a gentleman whose dealings with me have been characterized by the greatest possible generosity on his part. My copy is on A4 size paper, single-spaced but only using about 54 or 55 lines to the page. There are 116 pages of text, prefaced by a title page and a page of introduction. The title page states simply: "Portrait of T. F. Powys by his adopted daughter Theodora Gay Powys." On the introductory page, which is signed "Potocki of Montalk", and dated "Lovelace's Copse, Plush, Dorset 30 iv 65" we are told that Count Potocki:

played the part of a tape-recorder, taking down from her dictation paragraphs, pages, sometimes several pages at a time. I have then sorted out all these memories and materials into some sort of sequence, or else gathered all the paragraphs on some aspect of the matter together. What I have not done is to alter her language or her style, as this was not necessary, so that in a physical sense I have written down the book, but in her words. The very small part in my words, except where it is obvious that I am speaking or asking a question, is in italics.

Mrs Scutt believes that the word "dictation" is too strong, and I have promised her that in any revised edition of my book I shall include her

reservations on the subject. Nevertheless the similarities between this typescript and the recollections by Mrs Scutt which have appeared in numbers of *The Powys Review* were such that I (wrongly) assumed that she must have had a copy of the typescript in front of her when she was writing the articles. And there seemed to be no doubt in her mind when she recently looked over the typescript, reading a number of sections in detail, that it was an authentic record of her memories at the time when Count Potocki wrote it. I was particularly struck by the fact that it evidently contained some material which Mrs Scutt had forgotten during the course of the past twenty years, but which she recalled again upon reading the typescript.

The typescript is a source of evidence which clearly needs to be handled with caution, especially where it relates to events of which neither Mrs Scutt nor Count Potocki had direct knowledge. I therefore used it extremely sparingly in *The Brothers Powys*. But where it describes Mrs Scutt's personal memories of things which she experienced at first hand; or where it throws some light on matters for which at present there appears to be no other source of information, it cannot safely be ignored.

Richard Perceval Graves
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FRANCIS BERRY, Emeritus Professor of English, University of London, prior to his London appointment held a personal Chair in the University of Sheffield. Of his nine books of poems, the most recent is *From the Red Fort* (Redcliffe, Bristol, 1985). His literary criticism includes *Poets' Grammar*, *Poetry and the Physical Voice* and *The Shakespeare Inset*.

PETER G. CHRISTENSEN teaches English and film studies at the State University of New York at Binghamton. He is the author of articles on George Sand, Marguerite Yourcenar, Washington Irving, Paul Nizan, Lawrence Durrell and Italo Calvino.

CLAIRE HARMAN is writing the biography of Sylvia Townsend Warner. She has previously edited the *Collected Poems* (Carcenet, 1982).

JOHN HARRIS teaches bibliography at the College of Librarianship Wales, Aberystwyth. He has recently edited *Fury Never Leaves Us: A Miscellany of Caradoc Evans* (Poetry Wales Press, 1985) and is now engaged on a study of Caradoc Evans's literary career.

ANTHONY HEAD works in Japan. His articles have appeared in a variety of journals, including *The Powys Review*, *Contemporary Review*, *Art and Artists*, *Highlife*, and the *Review of the Anglo-Japanese Economic Institute*. His poetry has appeared in *English*.

ROLAND MATHIAS, the editor of *The Anglo-Welsh Review* from 1961 to 1976 and various collections of short stories and poems, including *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980* (Poetry Wales Press with Raymond Garlick) has produced a wide range of critical books and articles on Welsh writers from Vernon Watkins (Writers of Wales Series, U.W.P., 1974 to J. C. Powys (*The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk: J. C. Powys as Poet* (Enitharmon Press, 1979)) while himself publishing short stories and six collections of poetry, his selected poems, *Burning Brambles* (Gomer), appearing in 1983.

MARGARET MORAN is Assistant Professor in English and Research Associate in the Bertrand Russell Editorial Project, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. Her editions of Russell's work include *Contemplation and Action, 1902-14* (with R. A. Rempel & A. Brink), Vol. 12 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, and she has published numerous articles on Russell and related literature.

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CARL SPADONI is Archivist at the Health Sciences Library, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada. Formerly Assistant Archivist at the Russell Archives, he has written extensively on Russell's life. With Margaret Moran he has recently edited *Intellect and Social Conscience: Essays on Bertrand Russell's Early Work* (McMaster University Library Press, 1984).

ANNE STEVENSON is an American poet who has lived in Britain for over twenty years. Her seven collections of poems include *Correspondences*, *Minute by Glass Minute*, and *The Fiction-Makers* which was The Poetry Book Society Choice in the summer of 1985. In the past four years she has twice been Northern Arts Literary Fellow at the Universities of Newcastle and Durham. Her *Selected Poems* will be published by Oxford University Press in 1986.

COLIN STYLE is a freelance writer and journalist, his special subjects including South Africa (where he has lived and worked), the British countryside, and general literary criticism and biography. His articles and poems have appeared in *Stand*, *Cornhill Magazine*, *Country Life*, *London Magazine*, *PN Review*, *The Listener* and other well-known British and American periodicals, and he has published volumes of poems including *Baobab Street* (Johannesburg, 1977) and *Musical Saw* (Zimbabwe, 1981).

THE POWYS SOCIETY

(President. Glen Cavaliero)

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

The Membership subscription is £7.50 a year.

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