

The Powys Review

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The Powys Review

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T. F. Powys

This Is Thyself

Introduced and annotated by J. Lawrence Mitchell.

Edited by Belinda Humfrey

“The House with the echo” was apparently the favourite story of Violet Powys. We cannot be sure why she had such affection for this particular story—which few would rank among T. F. P.’s best—but it is perhaps no coincidence that it is the only story in which the narrator is identified as “Theodore”, and one of only two published stories written in the first person. Somehow it seems in character that the self-effacing Theodore Powys should eschew the first person narrative mode in his fiction. But, in fact, much of the earlier, largely unpublished, work, *was* written in the first person. “The House with the echo” and, more importantly here, *The Soliloquy of a Hermit*, are the sole survivors in print of an important stage in T. F. P.’s search for an appropriate narrative voice. He had tried the Essay (as in his unpublished piece on John Bunyan, originally commissioned by Ralph Shirley for *The Occult Review*), the Dialogue (as in *An Interpretation of Genesis*), poetic prose, and, in a desultory way, poetry. The results were rarely satisfactory, because the author could not effectively distance himself from his subject, could not escape the self. Sometimes, in the unpublished materials, we see evidence of the author’s struggle. For example, chapter one of *Elijah* (a product of Powys’s long “Biblical” phase) opens on a singularly apologetic note: “I am no human being that narrates the following matter (and therefore dear comrade I beg you to forgive me, if I leave out certain customs in writing that an Author doth generally use.)” However, by the time he was putting the finishing touches to *The Soliloquy of a Hermit* (late 1915), Powys had come to recognize one aspect of his problem: “In the old days I used to tie myself up in a mystic knot, that I never could undo; neither could I ever explain what it meant.” (p. 36, Village Press ed.)

“This Is Thyself” is intimately related to *The Soliloquy of a Hermit*, though the connection may not be obvious upon casual scrutiny. From internal evidence alone (the reference to being forty years old), the *terminus a quo* (at least for this section of the composition) may be taken as

20 December 1915 (Theodore’s birthday). The text begins with a section that was incorporated almost *in toto* into *The Soliloquy of a Hermit* (pp. 68-69, 1916 ed.; pp. 73-75, 1918 ed.; pp. 57-58, Village Press ed.); it ends with other shorter extracts used in the book (see pp. 72-74, 1916; pp. 77-80, 1918 ed.; pp. 59-62, Village Press ed.). However, the major part of “This Is Thyself” was not included in the book. Inevitably, it includes more than a few traces of those “mystic knots” from which Powys was struggling to extricate himself, and these can make tiresome reading. Yet, it is also a remarkably detailed and revealing document, no less for the states of mind or “moods” it represents than for the precious fragments of autobiography it encapsulates.

Some caveats are necessary before we proceed. We must be cautious about reading a document such as this in isolation, without the counterweight of evidence garnered from other sources; and, in evaluating even a manifestly autobiographical work, we must remember the selectivity of memory. Thus, the preoccupation of “This Is Thyself” with outcasts and suicides (Holy Tom, the tramp, the errant clergyman) probably reveals as much about the state of Powys’s mind when he was writing as it does about the world in which he lived. Moreover, he sees himself as one of their kind, specifically calling himself “an outcast”. Yet there are internal indicators in the text that life was not altogether bleak. Powys writes of the past at times with more than a hint of nostalgia: “I miss those old days, the odd stumbling humans that I knew then, I miss the rain that fell, I miss the barn . . . How glad I would be to go back”. And Powys reveals his own awareness of the way in which his melancholy disposition affected his view of the world; in his move from Suffolk to Dorset, he observes: “I found that the same grey colour was around me, *I had not moved away from myself*” (my italics).

It should also be noted that this piece is fictionalized, not straight autobiography at all—rather in the manner of Louis Wilkinson’s

Swan's Milk. My search of the public records (including the electoral rolls) reveals no "Mr Elsley", for example; Arthur McDougall was the "gentleman", a substantial landowner in Rendham, to whom the young Theodore went to learn farming. Other names also appear to have been changed; and there are sometimes minor details in "This Is Thyself" that do not entirely accord with the record. We are told that "I took my first lesson in farming on the Monday morning after my arrival . . . the first of March." But Powys's diary for 1892 shows that in fact he arrived in Rendham on Tuesday, 2 March and began work on the Wednesday. Trivial details these may be, but they are also salutary reminders of the need for caution.

There are points of contact between "This Is Thyself" and other Powys writings too. It shows affinities in tone and content with *Mr Tasker's Gods*, an almost contemporary work, especially in the "blood" passages about the injured cow and the pig being driven to slaughter. The "Holy Tom" herein described appears to be the source for "Mad Tom Button" in "The Left Leg", as well as for "Holy Tom" in *The Sin-Eaters*, that odd, and still unpublished, play by Powys and Stephen Tomlin. Charlie Downton, who "longed above all things to be a postman" would seem to be the prototype of the hero of the unpublished story, "Charley" (a spelling which also occurs in "This Is Thyself"). He too "always praised the life of a postman", but is said to be the son of a simple Norfolk journeyman, not the feeble-minded son of a gentleman. For one version of this story (in the Bissell collection), Gertrude Powys made a neat pen-and-ink drawing.

Finally, it may be helpful to say a little about the provenance of the typescript from which this text derives. It was deposited in The Dorset County Library by Peter Riley, who had transcribed it from the manuscript now at the Harry Ransom (formerly Humanities) Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. In his transcription, Riley was faithful to T. F. P.'s idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation. When he copied it, it was still in the possession of Francis Powys. Another copy of the typescript was recently sold to a private collector. There are in fact two manuscripts at Texas. Riley's source was, quite properly, the fair copy, in a single notebook. But there is also a rough copy, demonstrably earlier, written on the versos and spare pages at the end of another notebook, of 82 pages. The rectos of this notebook contain *The Second Child*, a very

early (pre-1910) work, evidently influenced by Bunyan. In this early version, "Devastator" has been written over "Destroyer", and there are occasional phrases of interest that have been excised in the final version—for instance in the description of Theodore setting up at White House Farm, Sweffling. In the original, after the reference to crawling under the wood as a child, Powys writes movingly: "In this house I will live, /I said/, and work in the fields and think as I choose to think and do as I choose to do . . ."

That part of "This Is Thyself" has been utilised in the production of *The Soliloquy of a Hermit* points to the fact that the book is by no means a homogeneous work, but an amalgam of originally separate autobiographical pieces. As far as I can reconstruct, it had its genesis in "Mr Thomas", a fictive projection of Theodore himself, written in 1912-13, and later cleverly incorporated into the second half of *The Soliloquy of a Hermit*. In order to make the original story fit, Powys was forced to invent a young man from whose point of view "Mr Thomas" could be described. Necessity being as ever the mother of invention (he was by this time hastily trying to patch something together which would serve as his contribution to the "Confessions" project), Powys thereby also solved for himself the problem of narrative distance: "I hope to get at the other side of myself, that I could not very well touch in the first part of my confessions." (p. 66, Village Press ed.). The extracts from "This Is Thyself" used in the book provide a transition of sorts from the newly-worked "Confessions" to the older "Mr Thomas" section.

EDITORIAL NOTES

As J. L. Mitchell explains above, the text printed here is copied from the typescript in the Dorset County Library, Dorchester. Although it is T. F. Powys's 'fair copy' from a 'rough' notebook copy, the text which has come to us appears to be a fast, first draft of a piece which would have been severely revised and improved by Powys and/or a literary editor for publication, especially in its punctuation. Examples of such severe revision may be seen by looking comparatively at the punctuation of those few passages in "This Is Thyself", below, which were absorbed into *The Soliloquy* (or *Soliloquies*) of a Hermit.

In presenting "This Is Thyself", I have retained T. F. Powys's paragraphing, phraseology and words intact. However, for ease of reading, while aiming for a minimum of altered or extra punctuation, I have sought for consistency throughout *where it was intended* (e.g., Devastator with a capital) and I have

strengthened punctuation marks throughout. In writing "This Is Thyself", T. F. Powys favoured runs of short sentences, punctuated only by commas. Where sense allows, I have kept these. However, while not substituting dashes for commas where parenthetical sentences might prefer them, I have throughout substituted colons, semi-colons and full-stops for commas, where it seemed the reader might most need help. In copying the typescript, I have recorded the few words which Powys deleted and replaced (e.g., fold/ugly/), as these are interesting.

In my *Recollections of the Powys Brothers* (1980) (p. 49), I mentioned "some early confessions, still in manuscript" which I saw as describing T. F. Powys's early observations which prompted him to write against cruelty: the terrified cow which battered itself to death; the callous cruelty one to another of Suffolk villagers. It was to "This Is Thyself" that I referred.

This Is Thyself

Ch. 1

I want to know how I have reached this silence, this quiet haven that I longed for as a child and I could not find it. As a young man walking home at dusk after having touched the hand of a girl, (Ah who can touch a girl's heart) I longed for it then. And as a man when I struck about me breaking up old thoughts, burning, thrusting, tearing, and at last leaving myself naked, I longed for the silence then. I have feared it, I thought that to reach it meant death, the first step towards death, and I struggled. I have tried to piece the old thoughts together that as a man I had broken. I was like a child who thinking that she was too old to play with her doll had long ago left it at the bottom of her cupboard, but was forced on a rainy day to find it again and to tie on its broken arm and find it a new head. I sought for my broken God again and I put It together as It used to be before I, as a man broke It to pieces. I fancied as I grew older that life had begun to run away from me. Life, the gay laughter loving boy was frightened at the new companion who now began to walk with him and I feared this new companion; and so when a girl gave me a kiss of her own free will, I rejoiced, I thought that life would come back, but it did not come back. The girl's kiss was

a betrayal, "this is the one you seek" she said by that kiss. I stood amongst men a marked man. "He whom I shall kiss, he is the man" she told them. And I could not hide behind child's kiss; I was led away. I am in the walls now, the walls of silence; I cannot break again into life. The passing to and fro of the shadows of men are nothing to me now. Wife and children and that last kiss. They are gone and I begin to know myself. I can now love the wonder that is becoming myself.

* * *

I live just as an old man should live, I take every day as it is, I do not try to break the day to pieces as I used to do. The days fall past me, I no longer try to hold them. The days pass me like hurrying girls on light feet. Years ago I longed to hold them and find out what secrets they hid under their cloud and sunshine. And now I know that it is the days that long to find out my secret. They cannot find it out, they are bound to the wheel, they must dance on and on and make the young men follow them. And they are caught sometimes, these girl days, they are torn and broken and their evenings are muddy. Yes, the days are torn to pieces by man, the girl days. I think I had better give my secret to man in the words of my own life; but let me say that there is nothing of gain in my story, there is no return to a creed that has been broken, there is no repentance for the kiss, there is no binding on the head of my God at the end. My secret does not give hope for those that love to eat and drink, there is no soul's drug in my secret, there is nothing to be gained by knowing it. I don't wish any reader to think that at the end of the book he will find heaven. There is life in this book, human life, my life: let him read about that; but the last word he need not read, it means nothing to him.

A thousand ways life has to keep her children to herself. How she must hate man; before man came all things were hers, the beasts could not escape, her chains were fast upon them. The beasts were wonderful, they grew eyes to know the light, they grew ears to hear the tread of their foe. In every way they

grew wonderful in the darkness of their prison, and life was glad her children were safe. But man came, and at first all seemed well; she hedged him in too, she gave him woman that brought him down always to the earth, to the same place from whence he came. After he came from the womb she *forced* him to beget by means of the womb again so that he might create new men, and call himself their father. Life held man chained in matter, every where he looked he saw matter, he could see no end to the stars. They too could die and be born out of the womb of the great night and the coming together of two suns. Life forces man to eat himself and his brothers the animals, she forces man to fear death and to do things for fear that he leave no mark behind him. I intend that this book shall be my mark; so far I will yield myself once more to her, but she shall not pull me into her body again, she shall not take me and use me as her child again. I am not her child now; I belong to myself. The prison gates were broken at last by man, this we know, and we foolish ones say that one man broke them and made us free. The thought of freedom found expression in that one man, the kind of expression that was the easiest to kill. And so when the thought came out in his life it was easy to kill. Why should we make that man into a God in order to kill his thought? It would have died more slowly but just as surely if he had been allowed to keep simply a man. Life knows well enough that to her the danger is the thought that lives in man and not the spoken word that comes out of him, for there are priests in plenty to devour the spoken word after tearing it to pieces in their temple-troughs. Man is tricked by life because of his pride in the spoken word, because he longs to make a distinct leaf mark in the great tree and so man cries out his words and the dogs and jackals eat them. But there have been some that did not cast out the thought, for thought has grown in man, and time has not been able to kill it. It has grown up, until it became rich with one word, the word at the end of the book. The word is beyond the dogs' teeth, and man escapes

from life in this word. My story is written to show how life hath held me back, showing me the whip sometimes, and using it too if she found my mind in any way receptive to thought. If a thought was there she laboured to get it away from me so that I might lose it, she set traps for me so that I might let the thought go. And when she could not win that way she tried to cover it up in my soul so that it should never grow and so that I should still be hers. She sent me out to work but the thought still grew; she gave me a girl and she expected that the thought would die but it did not die; she gave me children but still the thought of escape grew; and last of all she sent me the kiss. The kiss that would make me young, that would put death far far away, the kiss that would make life's blood race again through my body. Life was tricked by herself that time: she could hold me quite easily to the girl but she could not hold the girl to me, the girl grew to be afraid; but let that come in its place in the story. Even now those that read this are setting a trap for me in their minds. You are saying what is this thought that shall free man, from whence comes it? I do not fall into this snare now; I am too old. I shall not give the thought a name, so that you in the name of life may stamp it out; the name at the end of the book is enough for you and I to know now. There is no need for priests to eat my words as they do his, you know who I mean, we will keep the thought unspoken till we die. And it will light us through our lives. I know now how life has tried to kill the thought, tried in every way, she even went so far as to call it by His name, the name of the last betrayer, she thought that then it would fall an easy prey to the priest.

* * *

As I look back the thought of my life was ever smooth and even, and I wonder that such little happenings were full of so much meaning to me. The forces that moved me were like little fairies rolling a great stone down a hill, and it takes only a little fairy to roll a stone down a hill. As I stoop over the mould in my garden, I look back to the time

when I used to try to prevent myself falling, when I used to hold to the grass and moss as I fell through time, and I thought I stayed my fall by so doing. I know now that the treacherous grass only held me for a moment that it might push me on the faster, and if by any ill chance I tried to hold by a flower, I know how fast I fell when I let go. For the law is that no one can hold to anything for long. Whosoever is not falling is only making ready for a quicker fall. About ten years ago I ceased to try to hold on and the ground, if the Eternal can be called so, began to come up and meet me. I remember when I was 40 thinking that I could never let go my hold upon the earth. The thought of letting go filled me with despair. How could I, being alive go down into black death?

As a child I longed to be alone. I collected a few boards and, leaning them up against a wall, I made a hut, I lay under them and felt free and when it rained I was glad for I did not get wet. But in my hut I was not quite safe, I could be seen from the windows crawling in, so I made myself a den amongst the bushes and there I lay and dug up a kind of root out of the mould. I dug up this root because its smell was almost dirtily human: perhaps the human kind has a sort of earthy smell that all the soap in the world will not take away. In the bushes I sometimes thought of girls as a male creature would think of his females. On our lawn there grew a graceful fluffy kind of grass, and before it flowered it showed by the swollen part, where the flower was. We used to collect these grasses and open them and find the flower, it looked strangely limp and unready to be born. I know the first time I saw blood, much blood. We had a cucumber frame that leant against the wall by the road and by getting onto this frame I could look over the wall and down into the road. On market days when cattle were driven past there was always something fierce to look at. One Saturday I stood on the frame and looked into the road. I wore a print overall; I was trying to do up one of the sleeve buttons that had come undone when a cow was driven past by two men, one in front and one behind. The

cow had foam, bloody foam, all over its nose, it held its head down and ran from one side of the road to the other. When it came near, the man who walked in front stood just by our wall and the cow without any warning charged him. The man jumped on one side and the cow dashed its head against the wall just under me, she crashed down, and a pool of rich red blood came from its head. It lay with its tongue hanging out and its head in the blood. The utter madness of the beast was God like, its rush at the man was terrific, and I wondered how any man could be found brave enough to go in front of such a creature.

About the same time I saw a great pig being driven to the slaughter house. We had fled with our nurse inside a little gate. The pig was mad with terror. It dropped white foam from its mouth and when it stood, still, the butcher in his murderer's blue coat that was always splashed with blood hit it on the mouth with his heavy stick, and hit it again and again until blood and foam dropped on the road. The butcher rained blow after blow, I can hear the blows now, and we saw its bleeding head. At last with a human squeal it rushed into the death house.

The first feeling a boy child [has] to a girl child is hate; there is lust in this hate, lust that would tear and beat and leave its victim in tears and deflowered.

When people talk about the innocence of childhood, they always mean something quite different, they mean primitive instinct. I am as innocent today as when my brothers and I attacked that little girl in the walks. I wanted to hold her throat, to hold it tight, I longed to beat her face with my hands, I wanted to put handfuls of her hair in the road.

I remember being taken to hear a set of mission sermons preached in the massive almost square church in the middle of the town. The preacher was a big man with lusty side whiskers and a small mouth that looked round and deep like a red pit in a wood. He had a God like way of dealing with young people that sent them home in tears, he deflowered their souls because he was not

allowed to deflower their bodies. To us the town was changed as though it had been lifted by this preacher and put down next door to Hell fire.

A kind of abandonment to fear, a heavy red light hung over the great heavy church, and the children were thrust in for this man to maul and pull at their souls. One afternoon his almost crazed voice told us how Jesus loved children, but Hell, he shouted, to the children who did not love him. The little ones around me wept, the girls sobbed quite loud, the boys whimpered. My brother looked at me and saw that I was smiling, all the way going home he told me that I had smiled.

My brothers and I used to go long walks in the fields and I begged once at a cottage for a cup of water. We were walking that day along a white road that went for ever so I thought uphill. There was one cottage half way up the hill and I knocked, expecting of course to receive what I asked for. As soon as the woman in the doorway heard my request she damned me and banged the door in my face, and I was left thirsty in the road while my brothers looked like little flies on the top of the hill. I had a vision in my mind of a huge bony woman with bare arms and red hands, the ugliest thing that I had ever seen.

So far the world was a cake to be eaten by me, tea and dinner came to me and I ate, and sadness I did not know until I went to school. I was ten when this began. There was a country vicarage that I went out of, and a Grammar school I went into. It was in the old town where we had once lived, but how changed; I saw all things with new eyes, eyes that were learning to fear.

Odd things come to my mind, odd people; an old woman, the Head master's mother who taught us the Bible. She made at every lesson a rumbling noise somewhere in her belly, her dress was silk and widely braided with black lace. Her body took up a great round place in the room. I saw her once in a picture: she was Madam Bubble trying to beg a thin tired pilgrim to go with her to her bed. I wondered while I listened to the Bible

when the next rumble would come. And this noise is the only thing that I think is worth remembering about my school life.

My father had one or two friends and one was a clergyman of the low church party in London. There was in this good man a constant desire to find fault somewhere. He longed to make all men serve the king of kings and the king of England too. I was never quite sure which king he was speaking about, the Lord of Heaven or the Lord of earth, and Jesus he dangled behind them both holding him like a little dog on the end of a string. As I was soon to learn farming, he explained to me about cows being driven to the bull. He called me Old Man and said he could not understand why my father had never taught me about Jesus.

I did not go to a farmer to learn farming, I went to a gentleman who always tried to farm and never could succeed. This poor man found farming a continual drain upon his capital, and he was forced to make burrows into his capital like a rabbit every time he had a bad harvest, which was almost every year.

The groom met me at the station the first night I arrived and for supper I tasted beer for the first time: I thought it very nasty. In the morning I was shown the room where breakfast was to be and where Mr Elsley read prayers. When I first heard him read prayers, I thought his voice sounded a little unfriendly to the Bible. And as time went on and the burrows into his stocks and shares became larger, every morning he read more and more in anger. The sight of the Bible must have stirred up wild thoughts of hate in his heart, of hate to his family and of hate to me. He must have longed for us to forget to repeat the Lord's prayer after him, which would give him the right to damn us before he helped the bacon.

My first day was Sunday, a cold grey day with a north wind. And I set out to walk in the afternoon along a cold hungry road. This road was little used and the hedges were never cut. About a mile along this road there was a white gate that led into a muddy lane, and then the road turned sharp to the right

up a little hill, with three dingy, poverty stricken cottages at the top. I got to know this road very well later on, for Mr Elsley used to like to walk as far as the white gate on Sunday evenings, and he always touched it with his stick.

I took my first lesson in farming on the Monday morning after my arrival. I expected to find Mr Elsley himself ready to go out and with an open hand to show me the mystery of corn and grass and clods. The desire to do real work was upon me. I longed to put my hand to the plough, to rough it with the fields and to welcome rain, sun or frost as each came upon me. That Monday was the first of March. I put on my boots and opened the side door at 6.30, it was difficult to unlock, and like the gate of Giant Despair's Castle "Went Damnably hard".

In the yard a bitter wind greeted me and a big dog ran to the end of its chain and barked. A short man with a heavy overcoat, (all labourers wear the same kind of coat) opened the stable door and went in. I went towards the barn. In a shed a boy with a thin coat and his elbows almost bare was cleaning mangel, so that they might be cut up for the cows.

I stood a little way off and watched him so that I might learn how it was done. In one hand he held a sharp hook, and in the other a mangel, and he cunningly cut off the dirt and threw the clean mangel into the heap where the clean ones lay. No doubt he knew all about me and what I stood there for, and presently he allowed me to help him to cut the mangels and carry them to the cows. I can now feel the basket in my hands and the joy of tipping the sliced bits of roots into the manger. To me the scent of the hay and the cows was new and sweet and I loved it. I feel now as though I have been driven out from one sweet hay corner to another until at last I have no sweet earthly smell to enjoy, and I know that I am old.

When I went indoors again Mr Elsley had come down and was looking out his place in the Bible. Mrs Elsley was in the dairy with the short man that I had seen go into the stable. I was glad I was there to hear what Mr

Elsley said to his family when they did at last come in to prayers. My first task was to help the short man, who was a kind of groom, to chop up an old tree, and then Mr Elsley called me to come round the farm with him, and I began to know the fields. Each field was tenanted by great clods, and they had always to be broken into mould before any crop could be sown. In a lowlying pasture we came upon John, one of Mr Elsley's men; he seemed to be there quite by chance and with a spade he was throwing about the earth that had been cast up by the moles. I made friends with the men and worked with them nearly every day. They were queer creatures: the most simple subject, a boot or a watch, proved to be almost all their conversation. They had been toned down by hard work from animals into Christian labourers, and there they had to stay. What odd soul coverings human kind are proud of: each of these men fancied that he was something. One thing they could do and that was to hate one another. They hated each other like little old women, a smothered hate, and between the women and the men there was hardly any sex difference.

Labourers do not hate their wives as the rich do, because their wives cannot drag them any lower than they are. They drink, eat and house together and have the same heavy tolerance towards life. They meet one another and pass without speaking and their jests about the coming village birthdays are all the same. There is no growth in them, they think in herds and hate each one his neighbour. They laugh always a cruel laugh, and to make them laugh one must strike blood. A foul jest must be real. The school children can understand but not their fathers: they need blood.

They have the clinging virtues, the virtues that have made the species. I remember one case of how a girl watched over a man. A jest that the men had one harvest was about Holy Tom. Holy Tom was a married man and feeble minded; his wife was a terrible woman, she would scold at anyone who came near her, it was said that the Parson ran past her door for fear of her tongue. All

the village knew that Holy Tom walked out with a girl that had only just left school and was employed at the dairy. This girl whose name was Ivy had been starved every day since her life had begun in the womb of her mother. She was undersized, ignorant and poor, but she saved Holy Tom for a while. I believe if it had not been for her Holy Tom would have hanged himself in our cart shed. He used to go to Ivy's cottage that was near Mr Elsley's gate, and I often saw him there. One day in the harvest field we heard the news that Holy Tom was going to do it, his wife had beaten him. In the evening he was leaning over Ivy's gate, and she was looking at him with that clinging, searching look of a woman who longs, longs with her whole soul to make the man well. His look was hopeless, the demented stare was concentrated at the ground, the sod was his only refuge. Ivy took from her pocket a torn paper, her pocket must have been hidden somewhere in her petticoat, she dragged out a torn paper, an advertisement of furs and a tall slim woman dressed in them, she held this between the ground and Holy Tom's eyes; she believed that he must look, that he could not refuse the joy of looking at a real lady in furs. The August sun shone, what of that, the Lady and the furs were wonderful, his half mad feelings would be roused and he would be saved.

He raised his hand and slowly brought it down to the paper, then with a vicious unspoken gasp he crumpled it up, dashed it to the ground, spat upon it and worked it into the dust with the heel of his boot. Her first thought had failed and she tried another, she left him for a moment and then hurried back with something in her hand, it was the end of a twopenny cigar that a drunken pig dealer had thrown away. He took it and put it into his mouth and without lighting it slouched off. The next Sunday evening when Mr Elsley and I walking to the white gate we passed Holy Tom and Ivy, and he was smoking the end of the cigar, she held his arm and looked quite a Mother.

Holy Tom did drown himself in the end and Mr Elsley waited with his wife the night

when he was brought home. He had been in the pond eight days and no one had hunted very carefully for him; he had been found by Ivy and she got him to the edge of the pond with a muck rake and the shepherd and his dog pulled him out by the legs. I went to see the new grave and there was a bunch of moon daisies laid upon it, tied up with a white hair ribbon that Ivy had put there. The men did not make fun of Tom, they fear the dead, but they hoped that he had got Ivy into trouble before he went. But Ivy was too fond a Mother to allow that to happen, and so it turned out that they were wrong this time and they had to look for another couple to make a game of.

At the end of the harvest I saw a row between Mr Elsley and the short man who acted as his groom. The man had helped a little in the harvest and expected the full harvest pay. I had never before seen a poor man in a rage, he looked and snarled like a wolf, he shook his fist and howled. His brute anger won, Mr Elsley dare not answer, the man had the best of it then. But afterwards I met him when the winter had come, he was limping about on one foot, his great toe had been cut off and he was out of work; he lived alone and very soon was found dead in his bed.

Mr Elsey's farm was in a plain country, a country of poor, heavy land oftentimes trodden down by the poor heavy feet of the labourer. Smug clumps of trees sat upon the hills with always a Sunday afternoon look about them. The upland fields were small and square with deep ditches and water furrows running through them. The meadows were almost always along the little waterways. One day in April I spoke to a tramp who was picking watercress; he said he had once been a village schoolmaster. I gave him a shilling and he slouched away. This same man got into trouble about a girl, a girl who was hardly old enough to talk. She said that he had offered her my shilling, and they believed her and sent him to prison. She told the school children that she had torn her clothes on her way home: her parents were chapel-going people and knew how to lie.

The schoolmaster's story was not believed. He said that he had offered her a shilling for a common bead necklace that she wore round her neck; he was asked why he wanted it, but he would not say and so he was not believed. He went to prison and I heard that he had to teach the prison children their lessons; they were not afraid of him in there.

Another man who lived near us was in prison at the same time as the tramp, a clergyman, a friend of Mr Elsley's. He was there for almost the same crime; he had behaved unwisely to a young servant girl and his wife had got the police to lock him up. He told me when he came home that the reason of it all was the horrible dull life that he led and the hatred of his wife. The village people waited and longed for his downfall. His wife hated him because he would not sleep with her, and he explained to me that to hear a person snoring by his side always kept him awake. His wife put the girl in his way just as if she was a man trap. She had forced him almost to fondle the girl, and was always sending her into his study. The girl quite understood that she was the bait to bring the poor man down. He told me his life was quite unbearable and the little love this girl brought, and any girl can bring love, broke, he said, the blackness for a few moments. I was fearfully depressed, he said, worse than dead and to be a live animal for a few moments was a gain. He used to walk out only at night because the village children scoffed at him, and prison must have been heaven to him.

I remember his church yard very well. It was the only place he dared to go to in the day time. No one ever tended to it, the grass was never cut and rabbits had burrowed into the graves. Under one grave they had made so deep a run that you could see the black rotten boards of a coffin.

When his trial came off, it was proved that he had done nothing, nothing criminal. The girl owned that she encouraged him to touch her and that was all that he did. The Judge told him that his conduct had not been very seemly and sent him home, but first before he left the town, he bought a

little gift for his wife and a watch for the girl. He could never hate his wife and things went on just the same. I don't know why this clergyman talked so much to me, he must have known that he could trust me. I went with him into his church one afternoon in late Autumn. We sat in the high backed chairs that are generally found within the altar rails, and he lit the great candles upon the altar, and with the same match he lit his pipe. He had rather a noble face, a trimmed beard, a high white forehead and tired grey eyes. He looked noble and sad as he smoked in front of the tall candles, and he did not speak to me but to the white Christ that hanged fixed to a cross upon the altar.

"I find it hard" he said, "to reconcile my faith with the things that happen around me. But the mistake may be that the [Earth] Faith is wrongly interpreted and Christ's heaven is perhaps a perfect nothingness, for nothingness alone can be perfect.

"We creatures are pictures upon the walls of time. To have been in life, to have known time is our sorrow, our reward is to be dead. I have been able to obtain a restfulness, a hope, from watching a stone in a field, and yet the stone may by being shattered and broken break out into life. A dead body gives me a truer feeling of hope, hope not of a future life for the poor tired thing, but hope that its life is taken away from it for ever. How perverted is the ordinary Christian idea. The promise is that our little attempts of life shall end in the great sleep of Love. God's love that filleth all nothingness with a divine fragrance. To be nothing, to pass beyond life, to be the silence itself, the silence that is God's love. Christ renounced life, he hated the struggle to live, he turned away from it. He rose again to show that death as we know it is not death at all, it is only a change of body. He would have us go to more than sleep, to more than death, to the Father."

He stopped speaking. His eyes were fixed upon the Christ. A face showed itself at the window near to us, a greedy old wrinkled face; it was the grave digger who had just finished digging a grave. We walked back to

the vicarage along a lane that dripped with moisture, a foul evening mist was upon the fields.

“They hide in their huts like trapped wolves,” said my clergyman talking almost to himself, “they hide their teeth from each other.” We were just at a corner where he could see the lights of the village. “They hate Joy,” he said, “They hate beauty, they hate art. Wait till they have power; they will build bigger prisons than their lords have built, they will jeer and howl and cast all noble souls down in their mud. I know their meanness, their hatred, I have not lived among them for nothing. How they hide in their dens in brutal silence, or foully trying to cheat each other. I have never heard one of these, workmen they are called, praise anything noble or beautiful all the years that I have lived.

“And what have I done that they should hate me, they hate me because I chose to keep out of their mean lives. A clergyman is payed to be the clown and the fool of the village, the policeman that even children can rob and revile.

“What has Christ to do with these slaves? How can they understand his message? In England they make Christ into a scarecrow to frighten the Devil. In Italy they make pictures of him and hang him up on their walls. That is how they keep him out of their heads.”

We were standing by his gate and I was saying goodbye; he was quite excited, “Russia alone understands Him,” he said, “the light will come from Russia. Already they have touched a summit of glory.”

Footsteps came moving slowly along the road, and the clergyman, that had been a few days before in prison, hurriedly closed his gate and walked to his door, over the grass so that his footsteps might not be heard on the drive. I waited till the steps passed me, they belonged to a labourer going home from hedging, with a large piece of wood on his back, his feet made the same slow hopeless motion towards his home.

Charlie [sic] Downtown was another odd broken fellow that came my way, he used to

come and play cards with Mr Elsley. His father had been a small squire and Charley’s brothers had defrauded him of all his money; his sisters allowed him a little to live upon. He was a tall fellow and knarled like a broken fir tree though he was not old. Charley lived in the village with a mean little farmer who accused Charley of making love to his daughter, and forced him to work every day upon his farm as Jacob did of old, Charley being obliged to do everything the girl told him. The girl, who was quite young, treated him worse than a dog. I called to see him one evening to ask him to supper with Mr Elsley, he had just come in and was sitting on a couch near the fire. He wore the kind of breeches that button on the calf of the leg, out of doors he always wore gaiters. When I arrived, he had taken them off and he wore socks and between the end of the breeches and the beginning of the socks there was a piece of hairy skin looking very dirty. The girl whose slave he was, was lifting things about and heaping up papers and putting chairs in corners; she was trying in a very successful way to make things uncomfortable. Charley happened to be sitting on something, a paper I think it was, and she pulled it out from under him and then pushed it in his face. She was a pretty girl of seventeen, fair and plump, but her soul must have been very mean and small like her father’s body. I used to walk sometimes with Charley and he told me about his life. He said he could still remember the soft carpets of his father’s house, and he could remember how his mother used to pet his brothers and hate him because he was ugly. And the ugly duckling does not in real life become a swan. He told me that he missed the quiet of his old home, for now at the farm there was always some clatter going on, and some movement or other all day long. Whenever he came home hungry after working all day, he was sure to find the girl tidying, the man was a widower, or what was worse sweeping the floor. He had no peace, he said, and he could not get away.

Like Holy Tom poor Charley was feeble minded and I soon found out his secret: he

longed above all things to be a postman. Two of his brothers were in the army and one was a lawyer, but to Charley's mind the height of happiness was to be a postman. He told me that he had often dreamed of carrying the letters, and tramping to and from the nearest town. I tried to explain to him that it would be foolish for him to leave the farm, for it had become his home, and the best thing he could do was to stay there and post the girl's letters to her sweethearts. I felt sure he would be treated just as cruelly wherever he went. Country people are always the same. It was only Charley's misfortune that made him deserve pity. If he had been sane as his brothers he would have got on just as they did. The low life that he led had begun to eat into his soul, he never borrowed money, but he would get all he could out of anyone who tried to befriend him, and he hoarded up the pocket money that his sisters allowed him. He had learned to be dirty too and used to laugh in a brutal rustic way when the farmer told an indecent tale. He had been cast upon the dung hill and of necessity become akin to the dung. Love does not always make a man's life a vision of Glory. Amongst poor people their passions tend to bind rather than to loose their souls. When they love they love for a real purpose and not for a vision to light their souls. In their loves they move towards a set goal, and are fixed more firmly in their own mud.

I have often seen these labourers slinking after their women like foxes after the farm-yard hens, and the young fellows go about in crowds for fear of the girls and for shame of what they want to do. The woman with child is always the jest of the village, whether she be married or not. Country people have children because they have to have them. "How lucky they are," they say when married people have none. Blind lust and having nothing else to do, no other pleasure, makes them do it. One day poor people will have no more babies, and then they will win. No one would have missed the children in Mr Elsley's village. Everyone was glad when they were safely packed into the village school, stowed away like unwanted slaves

that can't be sold. "We don't get anything for them," I heard a parent say.

The humour of the labourer is marked with the beast's mark. The jokes of Mr Elsley's men were always ugly, and pointed with ugly meaning, they could never laugh at anything else unless they were drunk. I think Mr Elsley fancied that life was hurrying him into a corner, and if any tradesman sent in his account, it was as if he had been pricked by a sword. I remember he had a new dog kennel built while I was with him, and the village carpenter sent up his bill on Easter day before prayers and Mr Elsley read it with the open Bible before him. He did not say anything then, but he read prayers in angry gulps as if the devil was all the time pulling his nose, and when he finished reading the prayer that he read out of a book, and we were brushing the dust off our knees, he banged the table with his fist with the look of a madman. He paid the carpenter the same day, and talked about the parish council without a word about the size of the bill.

I have known Mr Elsley go out into the road after giving all his family to the Devil and speak most kindly to some old hag returning with sticks stolen from his field. One day I fell down flat on my face as we walked through the little copse near his house. Mr Elsley laughed riotously, he could not stop laughing and all through that day he broke out into hidden snorts and explosions. But he generally had a crabbed look for every one, without a smile, and he certainly never smiled before his labourers: I think he was afraid that if he looked happy they might think him a rich man. In those days queer country gentlemen who were poor used to take long walks, and in these walks they used to sit at wayside inns and talk about port wine or the way some local tradesman got his money. Mr Elsley, Charley Downton and I used to go quite thirty miles in a day, and call at any inn that was far enough away from Mr Elsley's house. On these happy days Charley's pipe was filled from Mr Elsley's tobacco box, and at times when he felt the road good under him

and the sun warm above, Mr Elsley might even pay for us all three to drink somewhat.

I can never now go into a little bar parlour without seeing in my mind we three sitting on the settle, Mr Elsley his pipe in his mouth, his head leaning sideways as he looked through the smoke of his pipe at the rows of bottles, and Charley with his gaiters under the table pulling at his pipe with a gladness that showed he had been given the tobacco to fill it, and I wondering what a young farmer's son was saying to the girl who waited upon us. On those days Mr Elsley forgot the burrows into his heap of money, he forgot morning prayers, he forgot his farm and he almost forgot his home.

I miss those old days, I miss the odd stumbling humans that I knew then, I miss the rain that fell, I miss the barn, the golden wheat straw and the sun that shone in March. I walked then upon the height before the Fall, I was still in the garden and had taken no forbidden fruit.

I have fallen, I know I am falling. I held to the grass, it gave way and I am fallen far far down the great white cliff. I hear the moaning of the dark waves below.

One day I must fall in there. How glad I would be to go back, I long to find myself in those days again. It is terrible to feel myself falling. I would be delighted to carry again the hurdles for the sheep, and make holes in the earth for the stakes to go in. I wish that I could walk with Mr Elsley to the tiny sea side village that we used to go to, and witness that even he could gather pebbles of delight.

I cannot go back to that life now, no man can go back, it is well that we do not know how fast we fall.

* * *

I hired a farm. When I first went into the farm house I felt the same delightful feeling of possession that I had felt as a child when I crawled under the wood that I piled up against the wall.

I wanted to love my home, to work with my hands in the fields, to use the work-people kindly, and to settle with my books into a quiet seclusion. I could not see the

Devastator setting his nets to trap me and lighting his hell fires / in my soul / to burn me out.

I intended to begin farming with sheep, and I wanted to shepherd them myself. I bought my sheep at the further end of the county and they arrived by the cattle train at 1 in the morning.

As I drove these tired beasts the three miles to my farm my thoughts were in the east, I was David watching my father's sheep in the plains. The beasts and I were alone under the stars, they were friendly to me and loved me and filled the road with the soft patterings of their feet. My heart was bubbling with hope. I longed to pass my life as a shepherd, watching the sheep. I shut the gate of the field and leaned over it watching the sheep lie down and they formed a half circle round the gate and looked at me with their pleading tired eyes. Every morning I went out early and drove them into the stubbles to feed.

I made my first mistake in the purchase of rams.

Mr Elsley advised me to go to a dealer and from this dealer I bought the rams, but their actions were not spirited enough to beget offspring, and for three months they deceived my flock and all the village talked about their failings. At least I heard what was said, and other more old and wise sheep fathers were found.

The lambs came late, and I wanted to hide them from the jeering eyes of my neighbours. I fed them as far as I could from the road, and even the leapings of the lambs did not give me the joy that I had expected. For a year I worked early and late and every work that I undertook convinced me that nothing done by me could prosper, my garden of Eden was beginning to grow thistles.

The first feelings of failure are the hardest to bear; one gets hardened to repeated misfortune.

I saw myself going down slowly and my God too had begun to decay, we were both going down together. All the time I lived there the men must have made me a fine reason for laughter, but I could never

believe that they were real. Their quaint clothes and rustic speech made them seem to me like pictures, and I ought to have left them as pictures, but I was foolish enough to look into their lives. And I found that their lives were marked, scarred, and torn; greed and jealousy and hatred lived in them. The elemental masters of men, getting and keeping, keeping even brown paper and little billets of wood, held them down: to have more than their neighbours was their only hope of life.

So far my life at the farm had been used by the Devastator, he had used this time to pitchfork God out of me. God had to be got rid of and even the most terrible fears could not keep him safe in me. The work of the Devastator was begun.

Nearly all that is written in books about a young man and his career is false. The young man's career is himself. His mind is not suddenly lit up with God like hope, he has just the same fullness of greed when he is young as when he is old. A young man believes in himself, an old man has found himself out. Quite lately I sat in an inn with my brother and we listened to the talk of two young men. They were drinking and they took no notice of us. Their talk was about wine, "We will not drink Dry Royal our next merry meeting," they said. Girls they spoke of, one showed the other a cane into which he had cut notches, each notch was a girl he had seduced. The other laughed and said the girls really seduced him, he could only count four on his cane. There was nothing beautiful about those young men at the inn. Were they from Oxford I wonder?

I soon knew that the farm did not prosper, and one thing after another went wrong after the mistakes of the rams.

I felt rather as if someone was rolling stones at me down a hill and that I could not run away.

In some ways a young man is always old, his instinct is very old, it drugs his new life to sleep, it forces him to eat the earth, it makes him forget his soul.

The Devastator cast his stones, and I hid

myself as well as I could under the rough skin of a million generations.

The suicides in the village where I lived were abnormal. One man killed himself every year that I lived there. I knew each man well. One a most quiet peace-loving Blacksmith with a grey pointed beard, he used to work all day and he worked well and earned the good wishes of everyone. One day he tied a little bit of dirty rope round his neck and tied it to a perch for hens that was in his shed and he stood on an old bucket that was too broken to be of use for anything else. He acted quite right to stand upon the bucket, just as a clergyman would have done, though it could not have been easy for him to tie the rope standing on the bucket, then he kicked it over. The toes of his boots touched the dung on the mud floor, and it must have taken some time for the rope round his neck to strangle him. The Innkeeper I remember, shuffled away with haste from the coffin. He had smelt his own foul breath and had mistaken the stench for the dead man. The dead man was clean and with a plate of salt upon his chest he looked at peace, a little discoloured where the rope had been but at peace. The gentlemanly doctor told us that he had advised the blacksmith to walk out more in the evenings for the sake of his digestion. Well perhaps he ought. Any how he had walked his last walk to the shed after his tea; it was after his tea that he tied the broken halter round his neck and kicked over the [broken] bucket.

Another homely companion in this terrible mystery of self destruction was a road mender. Quite a peaceful person with a sheepish white face and white side whiskers. He dug thoughtfully at the roads and was cheerful and pleasant to the passer by. He never stayed idle to talk for long; after a few words about the day and the time (he always wanted to know the time); he went on with his work . . . He never hurried and he carried his spade gently and lovingly as if it was his babe.

It was hard to believe that this quiet harmless being could have climbed up to an old beam and fastened a rope. One end round

his neck and the other round the beam and then dropped.

We all searched for him and I found him. The barn had been used for this before, so I went there. I was afraid to light a match for fear of setting my hay on fire. I felt an old sack first and then I felt his boot. It was as dark as the grave. One witness said that he did it because his sister was going to live with him and he could not bear the thought of her nagging tongue.

The new road mender bought his spade from this sister when she came; he gave her sixpence for it, it was an old one.

William was another of them. He had fallen in love with a girl above him, she was a little fat round creature with black eyes and short fat legs, a farmer's daughter; she looked at William in Church. He always went to a seat where he could see her look at him; she sat in the choir and they looked at each other during the standing up minutes. One day she met William at the corner of the road near the shop. He said he loved her, she turned white with anger and told her father what he had said.

William was a good workman, a carpenter. He drowned himself, following the example of Holy Tom, in a pond. The other three were only worn-out, half starved old men who thought their time was come. Women in the country very seldom kill themselves; why they don't I can't say.

And really the Devastator has no need to throw stones at these poor people. He has only to hint that they are not wanted and they go. They go the easiest way that they can find; a walk after tea is all they want, and a rope. He has thrown many stones at me now, but I still bear the weight of life, and I still feel the pain, the great injustice of living sadly. Then I only began to feel it. Why are these hideous old nightmares still amongst us? Why does Ugliness, the lord of the cloven foot, rule us now? Why are we still broken and rent by the old base lusts? And we, we are proud enough to strut like silly birds each upon his dunghill.

Our windows towards heaven are too

narrow, the darkness presses heavily upon us.

I felt this last night when I awoke early and believed that the day was coming. The first dim light was there grey and sad, it was there in my room and it slowly grew more faint. It was only the last sorrow-loving presence of the dying moon. It died and left the night [still] alone with me.

I have found the days long some days; the earth was trying to shake me off as sheep would a maggot, but I held on, I still held on with my nails tight in the earth's rough skin.

Why did the others insist that I must go? Why did they show me so clearly that I was not the right kind of thing to live?

Why do men do outrage to the sun's great beating heart, and forbid all true loving? For all true loving is of the soul. Why is joy cast out like a bad bone to the dogs of lust? Of what use do we make of the world? To hate it, we must all hate it if we have eyes to see. Our homes are hatred itself, our homes breathe hatred as a dragon does fire. The passions that filled hearts of beasts hundreds of millions of years ago, rule us now. We can fly in the air but we cannot bring our own lives into the sun.

Does not the light draw the light? But we love hate more, we call it noble. I suppose as a little child I must have felt sometimes that the world intended to take away all that I had, intended to put me into pawn until I consented to live its kind of life. Women are the chosen messengers of the world, the flesh and the Devil; they soon tell the cast out one that he must die.

"He will not give us what we want," they say.

"We want children by a man with a gun.

"We will have it so, we will have marriage, marriage the defiler, the destroyer of love."

There was a field near my farm where I used to walk, it was quite bare, and I never remember seeing anything grow there. There were thick woods all round this field, and in the middle there was a pond. I used to walk there to get away from the men that worked on my farm; I had begun to [write]

/read/books, and I went to this field to read. One day in the middle of the field I saw a red spot upon the grass, I walked to it, it moved, sprang up and ran away. I searched out the place where she had been, I fancied the bare ground was warm. Why had she run away? The Devastator was beginning to break up my ice, I had begun to thaw. I did not know this, I felt only pain, pain and fear. I had not kissed and was to die.

The hours of the day were too long for me, I could not work. Labourers know by instinct when to sow and when to reap. All country people know these simple things, they are the only things that they do know. My sheep had been sold and a boy could feed cattle better than I could. The earth was slipping away from me. I tried to prevent it. I asked a girl to help me, she was one that I hardly knew at all. She would have none of me, she wanted someone the earth loved, and the earth hated me. I had come to the bottom of things, to the land. I had believed it to be simple and truthful: I found the biggest lies there. The land was sweet but man made it sour, the hatred and malice of man had turned the heart of the soil.

From the landlord who stood with his loader behind him ready for the flock of pheasants to be driven over him, to the labourer bowing down and stained with mud, all of them who come between these two extremes, hate the man who would change them into men.

It was a great break-up to me. I thought that every one must try to spend himself. And I found instead every one greedily catching at sticks and straws. I began to see that a terrible waste was going on all round me. It was as if a gambling hell was everywhere, the people everywhere labouring for the things that perish. Even the loafers were not contented, they wanted to work, they even wanted to steal. People were still creatures that follow instinct, instinct that pulls joy after it bound with a chain. Man can only be free when he can do all that he does for the joy of doing it.

Everyone that I found was trying to take without giving, to keep without getting. The

lowest hated the one a little above him and so on till the top of the ladder. O the blind silly wasteful passions that drive men; no wonder that some do try to cling to the Cross, and the Cross is even now a real and living thing, but only children, only children can cling there.

I would that I could become a child. I cannot be saved by believing in another man; I feel myself too much, I cannot let myself go, I am too sober. I have too much of Christ in me to believe in him, I feel and know his manner of life too well to love it, I am an outcast because I am too near the light.

Some days when I found that I was not wanted on the farm, I used to walk, tramping miles along desolate roads, I cared not where. I found one very [old]/ugly/village far away from my home. The thought of this village almost terrified me. It lay in a dreary waste of flat fields and the houses were all set round a bare patch of grass. A fire had destroyed the inn, and a new one had been built that jutted out like an unsightly tooth. The other cottages were all old, rain splashed, and all the same. They had been built by a nobleman, who had created the village, moving it from his own park. Half of them were empty and the windows were broken and the whole place was threadbare. When I looked upon this village I felt death at my heart, not death the sister of sleep, but death that clings to life, slowly decaying it. I sat upon a stone on the grass and looked round. A dirty woman came from one of the hovels and hung a dirty shirt upon the thorns of her hedge. A cripple hobbling with the help of two sticks wriggled like a wounded crab towards the inn. One lean pig ate stalks of cabbage out of the ditch near the houses. The whole effect was horrible to me, and I walked quickly away when I heard a girl ask rudely, "Who's that?" pointing at me.

I know now why the rich employ farmers and foremen to manage the poor, the slaves. The most ignoble task is to compel the labourer to work. And so an army of slave drivers with hunger as whips are employed. I was forced to hire a foreman to protect me

from the other wolves, and the foreman took his blood price. The poor are traitors to each other.

The day of my sale came, the implements were set in rows and the furniture was carried out under the witch elm on the little lawn. The horses were ready to lead into the ring, and the hens were shut up, and the cows chewed their hay in the yard.

I was glad, I longed to be delivered from the menservants and ploughs and oxen. Creatures know the ways of their herdsmen, but they will not thrive with a stranger, and I could only get profit from them, if my blood was mixed with theirs. I was glad to go away, no girl had chosen me as a suitable home companion. They were frightened my nest did not look safe, and now I was scattering my feathers to the winds.

* * *

It was well for me that my farm failed, for I might have quite lost my soul in the desire to gain. To have done a good stroke for himself, as it is called in business, appears to elate a man more than wine. The fact that he has won does not always make his face shine, but the joy of having got gains is ever present as a warm glow in his heart. I was worldly enough to be made happy in the same way. But that was not the experience that God, and why may I not say God? had prepared for me.

I wished to get away from the worry of losing, I longed to see some of the play in the world, I had a mind to hearken to the piping of the god of the woods, and to try to catch one or two of the sunny girl days that so easily escaped me, I wanted to take a new part in the play.

I left the dismal fields and the days of worry with joy. The heavy clay soil had made my heart tired, and I fled to the white cliffs and blue skies. And I found that the same grey colour was still around me; I had not moved away from myself.

* * *

Have I any one in my memory that I met there in the little cove of my abandonment,

that I can still love? There are two that I can bring again to life in my thoughts.

One was a servant, her name was Rose, she was neither pretty nor young, but her nature was gentle and caressing like a warm autumn day, and she could love without leaving pain behind her love. She liked to talk quietly while I held her hand, and she was so real a girl that to be near her gave me all the pleasure that I wished for. She gave my mind peace for a while. It is really quite easy for any girl to content a man and to quiet his heart's fever, but alas for a woman, there is danger in every little beginning.

The woman nature is too near to the earth for it to be played with, and Nature is always at hand to take hold of the least willingness that a girl may show.

If they so much as look at one another she will press them together for her own ends and their confusion. When I fled from the farm I thought, foolish me, that I was going to lie down on the grass that nearly touched the waves and drink in all that the rich sun had sent to me. Alas, it was myself that was there and not another, and I soon heard the voice again dim but very full, like the sound of waves over hills. It had found me. Who can flee from the voice that has shaped them? Let them hide in the most sheltered valley, he will be there too, for in their lives he speaks his words. It is no good to run away from him. The hand of the Devastator is upon man everywhere to press him down to the earth. At times under his yolk I have been allowed to taste a little nectar from the flowers, I have hidden my hand in a waterfall of brown hair, and I have caught a hurried kiss from breathing girl life.

One other flower my heart stole a moment from the Gods, and she I loved because she allowed me, a stranger, to hold her hand for a few moments.

She had taken out of God's hand eight years of time, and these eight years had been hungry ones for her. God had given her the years and had no doubt been too busy to remember the food. She was very poor, her frock had been black once but was worn almost green. It was made in one piece and

hung loose upon her body and she had under the frock her eight thin years. Her boots had no soles, and her stockings were full of large holes. And her hair was filled with dirt. She was owned by the poorest family in the village. I held her hand and we walked in silence to her home. Her lips said no word but her hand that I held told me that she was happy. Christ's secret was whispered to me from her hand quite plainly. I knew then why the lame walked, the blind saw and the madman was healed when Christ spoke to them. They had never been loved before, and the utter madness and abandonment of love changed their blood into fiery red rivers so that they were cured. The little hand with its straight dirty nails spoke to me with a gentle voice from the maiden heart of the earth. It told me that white violets almost always grew where there were thorns, it said that everywhere there was the same longing for life, until God himself was reached and in Him life as we know it ends. It told me that near God there is a terrible sea of blood and in it are madness and terror, but those who pass those waters behold visions. And then it gave me a rose that grew by the way side and was gone.

The white chalk hills had given to me only these two measures of good corn, the others that I touched with my lips were soiled. It was then that I knew the difference between innocence and the fall.

* * *

Pleasure had certainly not yet twined her arms about me, she came to me just as seldom as she had when I was bespattered with mud at the farm.

I was here to give myself to her but she feared to take me, she would not allow me even to kiss the hem of her garment.

I might have become a Christian, but alas I was too much at the bottom of life to believe. Often at night I longed to believe. It must have been the [long] dead nights that gave man the longing for religion. And the night is a real living thing in the country: there is no cheating its long hours in a cottage, they pass and pass and no rough

wind can drive them faster than they have a mind to go. Work is the only escape from the unutterable melancholy of the long slow hours, Work or Sin.

One evening after a dreary long winter I beheld a vision. I was walking upon the dry grass of the chalk cliffs. It was February, the winter's bite was still in the air. The day's rain had passed and the stars were cold and very bright. A wave of extreme joy passed through me. How strange that my first thought in this state was, that God is nothing. He is nothingness, and the cry passed through me. I saw with wonder and delight the joy of not being. The true marriage of the body with the spirit. And then borne on a wave of delight I knew how simple all things really are.

Why could not I live for joy? Nothingness that is God is ever near; why do we pain ourselves when that is so near?

The first beginning of spring was in the air, I heard the cry of the Gods in high places, I heard the cry of the night birds and the waves ever falling against the chalk cliff. What folly was in man who fought a beast's fight for gain! The very struggle for himself gave death his place in the world. With a little arrangement man might for ever abandon himself to joy. The brightness of the stars showed me a brighter presence that shone in the skies. From beyond life there came to me the perfect time without end, and it filled my being with its fullness of joy.

The vision passed and I returned home sad, sad that I dared not cast myself over the cliff into the sea. But in me the vision had left a deep love, a love of the perfect delight of Nothingness that is God. The next morning when I awoke I thought, Life is like a girl, she is best loved afar off, the day is hers but let our bed at night be the infinite couch of the Gods.

* * *

Here where I came kneeling for a blessing nature cursed me. It was no good for me to pretend that I loved to walk alone and to meditate. I have never enjoyed being alone unless by a fire with books or wandering in

an unknown town. I had come there to be alone, but I know now that I can never uncover my thoughts even to myself unless there is something human near.

How wasteful is the craving of unsatisfied desire; it is terrible that it is allowed to tear the souls of the lonely ones. Surely there might be found one of the other sex to minister to the needs without the cruelty of marriage, or the horror of prostitution? I wondered and I dreamed and feared.

I think what set me against my fellow men was that every one wanted to show what they could do. Surely a human being has enough wonder about him without having to show everyone that he meets who he is and what he can do.

From the lout who follows the plough to the wise man who understands the stars, each one longs to show you what he can do. They must each show you that they are something for the world to be proud of. Every one of these who could do so much, I thought, must be horribly ashamed of me who could do so little, and I began to feel shame for myself. The place was beginning to torture me, the cold white cliffs spurned my feet, and in my cottage it was always cold. When I tried to pick a primrose, thorns rose up and tore my hands, and the hills would not allow me to rest upon them. The sea refused to give me peace; it told me only too plainly that I was an alien to its ways, and I dared not drown myself in its waters. When I read my diary that I wrote about that time, I feel ashamed that I had not the courage to go and cast myself from the deepest cliff into the sea. I will read from the *diary*.

* * *

Went down to the shore and saw the 12 disciples drawing in their nets. I was near to asking them to leave their nets and follow me. Could not I too preach the words of love and pity, everlasting pity for the terrible sufferings of man?

I walked slowly past the fishermen and looked at them; they began to quarrel about the fish that they had caught, they each gave me a swift look of intense hatred as if they

would tear me to pieces. One stood apart from the rest and watched the others with a red gleam of hatred in his eyes, Judas.

* * *

I fear these days, they come and go like dark clouds, and the hours follow one another weeping. And I know that my soul weeps, and it must be a poor lost soul to hold me down so deep in the waters of silence. I long to shut myself up in a room with pictures, pictures that with a living voice of the Artist cry out against the sordidness of the world. Night and day I hear the moan of the sea.

* * *

A white gull loved by the trembling sea, my soul weeps, the gull flies above it. She swoops down to me, and folding her wings is perched upon the white cliff. Her wings were tired, she had gone too high. God is hard to follow in the night.

She sought me and entered into me to be my soul. And she said,

“He is harder to find than the secret of life, He is hidden behind dark clouds. How can I have found him? When I came near to him he was gone. And if I stayed for a moment the stars swarmed by me in the sea of his love, but Him I could not find.

I will stay in you for your life and weep. We may find him together.”

* * *

I hid under a wall in the hope that it might fall upon me. I dare not flee out into the sun and sin. I long to go to the bottom and sin but my soul will not let me. I long to cast myself into the sea of human folly; why must I stay apart? Could not I find a burning babe to lead me to the fire? My soul weeps and she only allows me to sin in safety in mock pastures where I only am the evil thing.

* * *

The spring is come. I walked over the green bosom of a hill to the little town, I passed a farmer and a buyer of sheep walking together, they were talking about the market price of fat ewes.

By the side of my way there was a gate that led into a little field. I waited by the gate a moment: a lark was singing above somewhere almost over the sea.

I looked over the gate. A girl was lying on the green bank, spring and desire were in her eyes. A man leaned over her, almost upon her, his hat was thrown on the grass, and he smoked a pipe. He wore black clothes and his coat shone as black will do sometimes under the summer sun. He was a black slug and she was a peacock butterfly, the slug lurched heavily upon the butterfly, and I passed by.

By the sea an old man was floating seaweed, taking up the seaweed upon his stick he threw it into the water, he was so intent at his play that he did not see me pass by. His eyes were full of play like a child's and he almost shouted with delight as the seaweed splashed into the sea.

A group of country people were sitting drinking outside one of the refreshment booths at the town. Next to one of them sat a young girl, she leant against the man, she wiped her forehead and laughed. Her summer frock was hardly large enough for her, the buttons had burst and disclosed her white underskirt; her little shoes and dainty ankles were warmed by the sun. She wiped her forehead and laughed, a hard cruel laugh.

The noon had come and the laughter and noise became quiet. The men and women lay down, the hats of the men fell off, and the girl lay on the grass and covered her face with her hands; she lay with the sun, without knowing it everyone worshipped the sun.

* * *

I watched a girl with wonder with longing, with delight, and she might have been a priestess of the sea. Her feet were bare and she bent down and touched the water with her hair. She was the fairy of the sands. I watched her afar off, and in my heart I prayed to her the prayer of man.

* * *

I have found a lonely pit in the middle of the heath, and I go there and lie under the

shade of an elder tree that grew alone in the bottom. By walking up and down many times in this lonely place I have trodden down a path through the nettles.

In this pit I very nearly became a Christian, I so longed for a companion that I thought I would pray for Christ himself to come to me. I knelt and prayed. Two soft eyes looked at me from over the bracken that grew about the pit, two love-lit eyes soft and beautiful. Was it Christ or only a frightened fawn that scampered away when I softly spoke to it?

I walked up and down the path that I had made, the nettles that I trampled upon turned black and bled to death under my feet. And I thought how under the bodies of men life is defiled.

Then I went to the town.

* * *

Corn cockles and red poppies kissed the last sunshine, a child's laugh and a child's sob came each from the same cottage, the sea dreamed between white cliffs, beauty that only a dying man could fully devour.

* * *

I only turn over pages; others read all kinds of delight; had God smudged my book in anger as he wrote? I walked slowly to my pit. On the way a lizard sunned its little body upon a rock. The earth was filled with delight for him. A red gleam came from the lonely hill near my pit; was it the frock of a girl lying in the sun? I climbed the hill, it was a piece of red sandstone.

* * *

The same old man that I once saw floating seaweed I met at dusk; this time he was piling up a heap of little stones on a lonely part of the downs. I felt that he must be exceedingly wise to pile up little stones. I sat beside him.

"I touch the stones," he said, "to prove that I still live. I show my life force by heaping up these stones."

As I walked away I heard his steps coming up from behind, "You have dropped your pipe," he said and handed me one of his little stones. I took the stone and thanked

him for it, and I remembered his face: he was the barber from the little town. A fortnight after I heard that he had been taken away.

What an evil biting thing thou art with thy two wild eyes.

* * *

I will end my diary here, and come to it later.

I have always longed to show myself and to make myself see where true joy is to be found, and I want to really believe that life is a simple thing. In those old days when I hid my head in the sand of mystery I thought that something wonderful would happen to me, and now I believe that the most wonderful thing is that nothing wonderful happens. We are just what we are and nothing else. And now by just holding up my hand I am oftentimes filled by a divine vision; by only hearing the wind howl in the chimney I am filled with all the harmony of music; by eating bread I am fed with the whole goodness and fullness of the earth; and when I am alone the calmness of immense seas and eternal spaces fills me.

For a very long time I hid my head under the sand and no wonder I could not understand my own words. The greatest wonders can be had for the asking; it is only the cobwebs spun in man's brain that are hard to understand.

How simply and with what joy should everyone take part in the great festival. The centre of life is always near, it is only the outer parts that are afar off and hard to understand. And I have often been very far off myself.

By these white cliffs and for a long time afterwards I only ran after the Chariot, and now I have climbed in. I know now that the smallest handle will do to hold to any part of life, and a million bodies like mine can be

formed from one thought. All my little experiences can be easily acted in any part of the earth. I might at any moment send out thoughts and create millions of moving bodies like myself.

Man has built up for himself such grotesque buildings, so high that when he reaches the top he has to fall off to the ground.

He is always forming such high destinies for himself that [he] has become quite unused to the simple being that is himself. Whenever a vision has come to me, it has always taken me and shown me the delight of just living, the joy of things as they are without being magnified into any remote heaven.

I have seen only too clearly that man's happiness is taken from him because of his desire to become something unutterable. In every way his wish seems to be to pretend to be something that he is not. I can see in every page of my life that my happiness was taken from me [so that I should] desire to go beyond the things that are.

I should not be surprised if I found the greatest mystic leaving all his burrowings into the inscrutable mystery of God's being and instead busy himself all day long, peacefully planting cabbages.

God himself has been raised up on high like a stone column that has only its mass to be proud of, and man is always content to knock his foolish head against the base. God is like one of those great giants that were carved in the olden days by kings who wished to live for ever in stone.

While I was there where the white cliffs were eternally washed by the waves, my thought was never clear enough for me to find any pleasure in it, I could never get my mind to pronounce any word plainly. I know that every one is bound to set his net in the sea of his life, and he brings home in his net the fish that he deserves or desires as the case may be, and he devours them or, what is even more likely, they devour him.

NOTES TO *THIS IS THYSELF*

p. 7. *the walls of silence*: the image of the wall is a recurrent one in the early work. Cf. "The wall hemmed Theodore in; he could not go out to the world beyond the wall" ("Theodore", Ch. 1, in *Hindcliff Tales*).

bound to the wheel: the wheel of fortune, for details of which see Ch. V of Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*, 1927.

p. 8. "*Life forces man to eat himself*" and "*their temple-troughs*". These phrases would not be out of place in *Mr Tasker's Gods*.

p. 9. *a den amongst the bushes*: a reference to Theodore's "Bushes' Home", first established at Rothsay House, Dorchester.

the walks: The Walks were streets laid out to follow the Roman town wall in Dorchester. Jo Draper's *A Dorchester Camera* (1984) includes a photograph of tree-lined West Walks in 1860.

church in the middle of the town: presumably St Peter's Church, Dorchester, where Charles Powys served as curate to the Reverend Knipe from 1879 until 1885.

p.10. *country vicarage*: Montacute vicarage, Somerset, to which Charles Powys moved with his family upon becoming Vicar of St Catherine's Church in 1885.

Grammar School: Dorchester Grammar School. See further my article in *PR* 19.

an old woman: Mrs Kingdon, mother of H. N. Kingdon, Headmaster of the school from 1883 to 1898.

As I was soon to learn farming: This encounter therefore probably took place late in 1891 or early in 1892.

at the station: Saxmundham station, on the East Suffolk branch of the Great Eastern Railway.

Mr Elsley: Arthur Frederick McDougall, father of two of Theodore's schoolmates, and an uncle by marriage to Louis Wilkinson.

p. 11. *I longed to put my hand to the plough*. T.F.P. never really did learn to plough very well, though he admired those who could. See Theodora Scutt's recollections in *PR*, 9, pp. 69-70.

Monday . . . the first of March: In fact, T. F. P. did not even reach Rendham until Tuesday 2 March 1892. It is unlikely that T. F. P. deliberately changed this trivial detail; so it is, no doubt, simply a lapse of memory.

Giant Despair's Castle: In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Giant Despair imprisons Christian and Hopeful in Doubting Castle.

John: John Sherwood, who later worked for T. F. P. at White House Farm. This incident is also recorded in T. F. P.'s diary. Years later T. F. P.

mentions Sherwood in a letter of 18 August 1926, to J. C. P.: "so, like John Sherwood who worked for me at Sweffling, I can hardly hold a pen."

I Holy Tom: apparently the model for a number of T.F.P.'s fictional creations. See Introduction. True identity undetermined, and just as well!

p. 12. *moon daisies*: T. F. P. wrote a story entitled "Moon Daisies".

a tramp: this tramp shares with Mr Tasker's father (also described as a tramp) the distinction of having been imprisoned; otherwise they are of very different character.

p. 14. *the vicarage*: the living of St Michael's Church, Rendham, is a vicarage.

Charlie . . . Charley: There are two stories in the Bissell Collection, which are relevant here. "Charley" is about a man who wants to be a postman; "Charlie" is about an outcast from the middle-class, who drowns himself for unrequited love.

p. 16. *the tiny sea side village*: Aldeburgh, about seven miles west, is the most likely candidate. McDougall had relatives there, and T. F. P.'s old school, Eaton House, was also there.

I hired a farm: technically correct. T.F.P. did not buy White House Farm in 1895; he was a tenant farmer.

my life as a shepherd: See my article in *PR* 19 for T. F. P.'s vision of himself as "Shepherd Poose".

p. 17. *peace-loving Blacksmith*: In a letter to J.C.P. (4 April 1936), T. F. P. recalls this same suicide: "the poor blacksmith who hanged himself did not look quite so gay but quite at peace—He had a wicked son who made him do it. He might have been mistaken about this son. I rather liked him." This incident may have provided the material for the fable, "The Bucket and the Rope".

the Innkeeper: In 1896, the incumbent at the White Horse Public House was Robert Elvin.

p. 19. *I asked a girl to help me . . . one that I hardly knew at all*: This marriage proposal to a local girl he hardly knew is nowhere else recorded. Under the circumstances, his rejection is hardly surprising. Louis Wilkinson records that "he fell in love with two of my cousins in swift succession" (*Theodore*, 1964, p. 11); but neither of them (Louie Ferrand and Jessie McDougall?) can be the girl in question.

built by a nobleman: Probably the Duke of Hamilton, one of the largest landowners in the area. He owned such properties as nearby Glemham House, in a park of 200 acres, as well as much of the parish.

forced to hire a foreman: T. F. P.'s foreman was Fred Nunn, with whom he was on excellent terms, notwithstanding the reference to his "blood price".

p. 20. *mysale*: The earliest relevant letter from Moore, Garrard & Son, the auctioneers, is dated 21 September, 1901.

my farm failed: The actual extent of this failure will be explored in a future article. It is sufficient to note here that T. F. P. began farming in the depths of the Great Depression, and was by no means the abysmal failure he seems to suggest here.

Rose: unidentified.

p. 22. *the diary*: Peter Riley had a brief look at a farmer's diary from this period, then in the possession

of Count Potocki, which he found "of no literary interest". This may be the document mentioned here.

p. 23. *a lonely pit*: An entry in T.F.P.'s "Day Book" for May 1913 describes his finding a human bone in this chalk pit, and imagining how it got there.

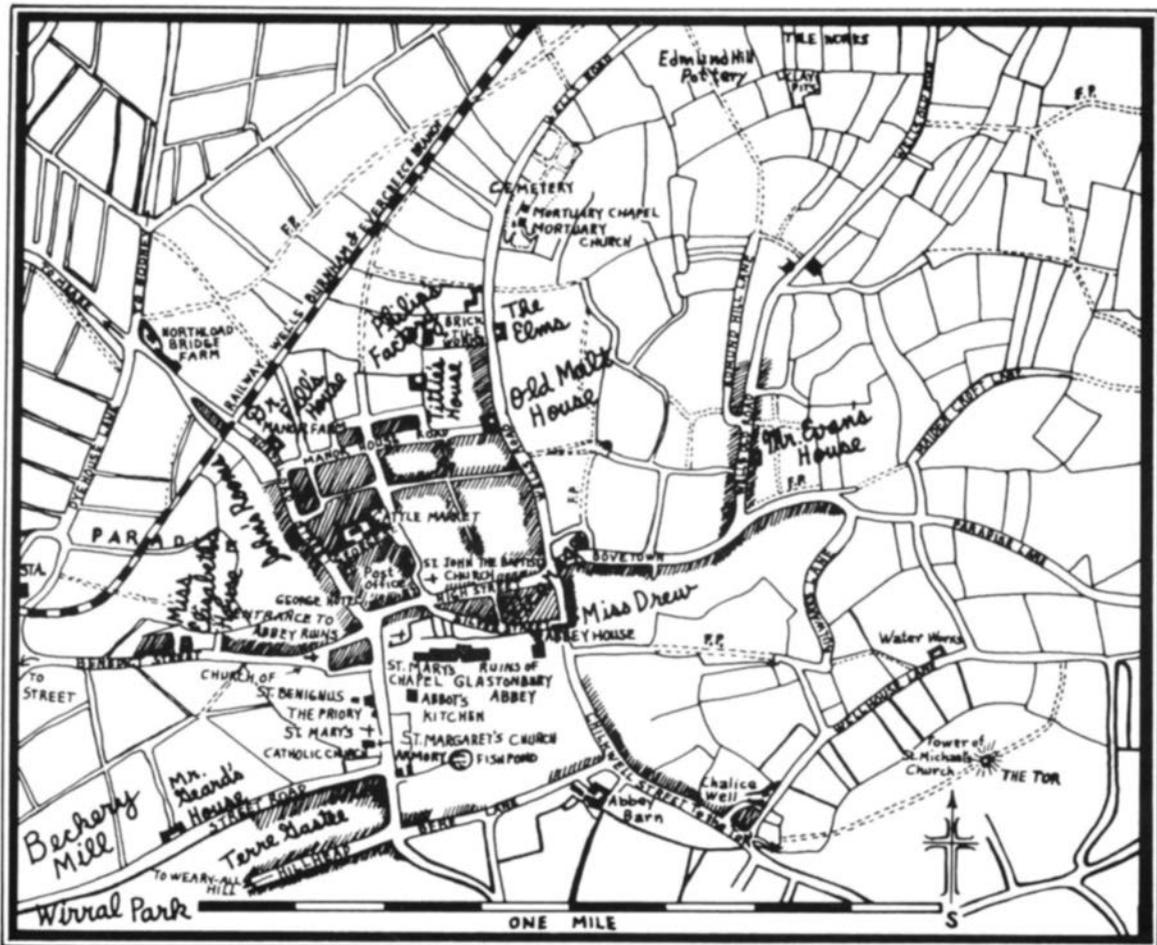
p. 24. *For a very long time*: Much of the material from here on was incorporated into *The Soliloquy of a Hermit*.

Susan Rands

Aspects of the Topography of *A Glastonbury Romance*

The idea of having Glastonbury as the setting for a novel seems to have come to Powys quite gradually and unemphatically. In January 1929 he wrote to Llewelyn that he had just finished correcting the proofs of *Wolf Solent*¹ and it was not until June of the same year that he wrote to both Littleton and Llewelyn that he was “inclined” to have Glastonbury as the background of his “next long novel”.² In England that summer he

visited Glastonbury for several days with Llewelyn, Alyse Gregory, and Gamel Wolsey.³ But he may have gone more often for “perhaps 3 times I’ll go”, he had written to Llewelyn.⁴ Back in America in April 1930 he wrote to Littleton that, “any pamphlets you may pick up about Glastonbury or Wells or those parts . . . do ’ee let me have them. I think I will not use any *sham* names in this book: I mean about the places”,⁵ and



Map of Glastonbury with 1930s notations by John Cowper Powys.

in May he told him, "I have got an Ordnance Map of Bridgewater and the Quantocks and one of Wells and the Mendips but Glastonbury is just at the edge between those two so that it is rather hard to deal with them together. I have nailed up the one that has Glastonbury on it behind the Stove on the wall of this room".⁶ These remarks indicate that having chosen Glastonbury, Powys was determined to make the setting as much like the real thing as possible. "I hope there won't be any mistakes",⁷ he wrote to Littleton on 5 January 1931 when he was in the middle of writing. It is interesting that all Powys's novels before *A Glastonbury Romance* do have "*sham*" names and that none do afterwards until *The Inmates*.

Powys's familiarity with the precise topography of Glastonbury and the different character of its various areas, as displayed in *A Glastonbury Romance*, is much greater than a few visits and the close study of maps and pamphlets could reveal, at least to any ordinary mortal, so one is led to think that he must have known it much better than the information so far published indicates.

HILLS *The Tor*

Speaking of Montacute in *Autobiography*, Powys tells how "from the high ground above the village could clearly be seen the conical shape of Glastonbury Tor rising over the Sedgemoor marshes".⁸ Indeed Glastonbury Tor is visible from many points in the surrounding countryside within a radius of twenty miles or so; for example, it is clearly visible twelve miles away at Cadbury Camp, Camelot, according to local tradition which modern excavation has tended to confirm.⁹ It is on record that, on at least one occasion, John and Littleton walked eight miles from Bruton, Llewelyn and Willie six from Sherborne and that Bertie cycled twelve miles from Montacute to meet at Cadbury.¹⁰ Glastonbury is about fifteen miles from Montacute, well within cycling distance, so it seems probable that the Powys brothers would have been unable to resist the lure of its odd-shaped Tor

and Arthurian associations, and would have made expeditions there in their holidays.

Both visually and geographically Glastonbury Tor is curious in many ways; it is very small to be so high; it is very high to be in such low land; from most angles it is amazingly regular in shape; from others it is equally oddly irregular. With all our modern aids to archaeological knowledge we still do not know how much of it is natural, how much altered by man. It is as great a mystery as Stonehenge.

It readily lends itself as a symbol. The upper part is much the same shape and size as Silbury at Avebury in Wiltshire. Michael Dames has explained Silbury as part of a huge model of the Earth Goddess where our ancestors four thousand years ago watched the earth herself give birth at harvest time.¹¹ He shows much ingenuity supporting this explanation and once having read it it is easy to indulge probably ridiculous fancy and see Glastonbury Tor as a similar model, especially on a day when mist causes the outline of St Michael's tower, and yet not the Tor itself, to disappear; this happens surprisingly often. Looking from the South East, Wearyall Hill could be the head, Chalice Hill the breast, the Tor the pregnant belly, and Stone Down the thighs of a gigantic female figure! Geoffrey Ashe, who has been living in Glastonbury for over thirty years studying her legends and history, views the configuration of the hills from a different angle but sees a similar figure.¹²

The great difference between the outlines of Silbury and of Glastonbury Tor is that Glastonbury has a Christian church tower upon it. The Tor strikes some people as looking ridiculous possibly because of the relative sizes of large hill and small tower. The fanciful might attribute the ridiculousness to the incongruity of a Christian tower upon an earth goddess symbol. However, in *Wolf Solent*, written just before *A Glastonbury Romance*, Wolf sees the "mystical hill of Glastonbury" as "the phallus of an unknown God",¹³ phrases that combine the Tor's sexual and numinous qualities.

For the Tor is amazingly numinous. To

look out to the landscape, expanding with each step we take, is at least very like a religious experience; perhaps the steepness of the climb leads to an increase of carbon dioxide in the blood with the effect of a sense of mental illumination, like the effect of religious chanting as described by Aldous Huxley.¹⁴ However this may be seen from a distance, especially when the sun sets behind or the moon rises above, it is a rare soul to whom the Tor does not speak; moreover it catches and emphasizes the changes of light and weather through the hours of each day, and the days of each season, “the extraordinary variety of atmospheric changes which the climate of that district evokes”, as the authorial voice of *A Glastonbury Romance* describes it. (254)*

But the characters in *A Glastonbury Romance* are in some ways a phlegmatic lot, very typically ‘local’ in that they take for granted the beauties of their habitation; for example, Sam, Owen and John, as they sit surveying the view from the Tor, are all too preoccupied with their affairs and their girls to be at all conscious of the effect upon them of landscape, light and atmosphere. (255ff)

The Tor, though some may see it shaped like a symbol of birth, is, in history and legend, connected with death. The last abbot of Glastonbury, Richard Whiting was brutally murdered there by the commissioners of Henry VIII, for refusing to surrender the abbey’s treasures to the king’s coffers and for his religious objections to the king’s other plans too. A medieval life of St Collen, a Welsh saint of the dark ages, tells how he had a vision of the courtly revels of Gwyn-ap-Nudd, sometime king of Annwn, on the top of the Tor. Powys abides by this tradition in that the murder of Tom Barter, the only death in the novel (other than in the flood), occurs on the top of the Tor; and he echoes the Celtic association of death with birds: “round about the crouching form” of Tossie Stickles, Tom’s wife, “a couple of great swifts, those pointed-winged demons of the high air, flew in narrowing circles, uttering their short shrill cries, and these sharp sounds were answered

by the melancholy and more familiar wailings of the peewits in the lower levels of Tor field, disturbed by Tossie’s screams and calling out warnings to one another”. (1052)

The near death of Owen Evans, when impersonating the crucified Christ in the mid-summer pageant also happens on the Tor, and while suspended there Owen has a vision of numberless executed and tortured creatures, human and animal. The last thing that Geard sees as he drowns in the “water that covered the spot where the ancient Lake Villagers had their temple to the Neolithic goddess of fertility” is “The Grail under its fifth shape—upon the top of Gwyn-ap-Nud’s hill”. (1118) The association with death lends symbolic meaning to Mr Geard’s “seeing how the performance looked from the top of the Tor”. (559) To this is added the sense that we know not what we do but are all part of a pattern, when the author later narrates,

If Mr Geard had not been playing, quite unconsciously, the primeval role of Gwyn-ap-Nud, the Welsh Prince of Darkness, and enjoying the spectacle he had wrought from the summit of the Tor, Lord P. would certainly have come to grief and there would have doubtless appeared some modern Judge Jeffreys holding grim inquisition into a popular uprising. (576)

As he runs *down* the hill he cries, “This is life”, and feels that he is about to save the Blood of Christ from being lost forever. “I’ll build a Saxon arch about the Chalice Well”, he resolves. (577)

Chalice Well

According to the great American Arthurian scholar, Roger Sherman Loomis,

The Chalice Well legend seems to have been a Victorian invention, since Warner in 1826 did not know it. In the Middle Ages the well was probably known as Chalkwell; the old name is preserved in Chilkwell Street. But apparently nothing so prosaic would do for a spring in the Isle of Avalon. The oxide of iron deposited by the water suggested blood; blood suggested the sacramental cup; the cup suggested the vessel of the Last Supper which Joseph had

brought to Glastonbury. Thus, we may suppose, sprang the belief that Joseph had buried the chalice in the hillside, and so the name of the well was changed from Chalkwell to Chalice Well.¹⁵

If this is so, the idea was still fairly new when Powys as a boy looked towards Glastonbury from the hills above Montacute; arriving at Glastonbury he might well have encountered, "among the natives of Glastonbury an obstinate notion that their Grail Spring possessed healing qualities". (892) I have not been able to verify whether or not "there had been references in European newspapers" but it is quite possible! There is a great legacy of belief still in the healing powers of Chalice Well water, and the 'vibes' to be felt in its well-kept garden.

Chalice Hill

If Chalice Well is presented in a Christian, albeit rather unorthodox, Methodist context, Chalice Hill is quite differently presented, as the particular setting of Nature's healing and comforting powers. It is a "favourite refuge of Cordelia Geard", where she cries "sweet, relieving, abandoning delicious tears" about the unhappiness of her lover; it is where "the soft trunks of the apple trees seemed to respond to her groping hands with a magnetic effluence of dark, rich, inscrutable vitality" (215), where the west winds "swirled about her as if they would have washed her, or laved her or exorcised her" (216), where "the earth seemed porous with mystery" (214). It is where John Crow worships Mary, his wife of two days, with "psycho-sensual delight" as they watch the "tall pale gold stalks of a ripe cornfield over against Bulwark's Lane" (619) (which goes across the top of Chalice Hill), where Mary's hand "caresses the cloudy pink blossoms of a tuft of fumitory" (619), and they "inhale the sun-warm, aromatic smells of those infinitesimal small plants such as tiny yellow pansies that seem to love wheatfields better than any other place" (621). Here they delight in,

the hum of insects, the shivering music of the larks, as if their very heart strings were

voluble within those little up-borne handfuls of feathers, the distant barking of sheep-dogs, the monotonous refrain of some invisible chiff-chaff in a hedge elm a hundred yards away, the sight of a mountainous ridge, slope upon slope, peak upon peak, of huge white clouds on the southern horizon . . . (625)

so that John Crow feels that "there is still a chance that all the hideous miseries beneath the sun, might have, down underneath them, some issue, some flickering outlet, some remedial hope" (624).

Wearyall Hill

Very different are the happenings on Wirral, or Wearyall Hill; these are pregnant with revelations of the desolate human predicament both personal and social. Owen Evans believes it is the actual "Terre Gaste" of medieval romance. It is where Tom Chinnock, "the sweetest-voiced choir-boy", hurls from behind thorn bushes missiles and ruderies at passing girls. People are found on Wearyall either when they have nothing better to do or when they have or are about to have shattering experiences. Here is Mr Evans when he has given tacit approval to Finn Toller's plans, and agreed to meet him on the top of the Tor at sunset to see murder by blow of an iron bar; here we witness his excruciating dilemma between the dictates of conscience and the dictates of sadism. Here Elizabeth Crow falls in a faint and is told by Dr Fell that she has at most five years to live, and more likely only two. (1056) Here we find Sam after he has seen the Grail, given Abel Twig his enema, and rescued the black dog from his tormenters; and here walks Angela Beere when she has just had a letter from Persephone to say that she is on her way to Russia. (958) Now Will, the chauvinistic, roistering womanizer is, Sam realizes, "alone again at Whitelake cottage" (958)—yet another revelation of human loneliness.

So too is the description of the meeting on Wearyall on Maundy Thursday, in moonlight, of Sam, John Crow and Tom Barter with Mad Bet, Old Jones and Young Tewsey, three of the town's derelicts. Old



Wearyall Hill, with thorn and bench. (This photograph and all accompanying this article, together with the photograph on the front cover, were taken by Ian Sumner of Wells.)

Jones is having a short escape from hospital where he was recently operated on but where “the ghosties coming out of they Ruings on rainy nights, and the spirits coming out of they Ruings on shiny nights” (399) greatly disturb him; and Mad Bet is having a short escape from confinement in her room at St Michael’s Inn. All evening Sam has been feeling as “if this tremendous shadow over Glastonbury of the martyred God-Man were calling upon him to fulfil some purpose, to make some decision” (387); John has been quarrelling with Mary, and Tom has recently deserted Philip to work for Geard for more money. When these three meet the three derelicts, Barter is recognised by Mr Jones as “the official one, the pillar of society in this little group” (399) and it is he who is anxious to leave the three oddities and to proceed with the walk in the company only of his friends. This outer conventional-ity contrasts with Tom’s inner sense of himself, as he strides off alone, as “like Judas, though Philip is certainly not like Christ” (404). Sam’s chief concern, on the

other hand, is to get the old woman safely home while John Crow talks to her about the moon and invites her to come with them. Mad Bet’s words, “Spit it out, spit it out or it’ll grow into a death tree” (404), seem to refer to all the lonely sorrow that is revealed on Wearyall Hill.

Edmund’s Hill

Although Glastonbury is often described as a town on three hills, there are actually four; Edmund’s Hill is not so high as the Tor but it is considerably higher than both Wearyall and Chalice. The views from it in all directions are magnificent, the finest in all Glastonbury except from the Tor itself. The western side of the hill is now largely covered with elaborately designed new houses but on the top are council houses; half finished ones may still be seen, just as Powys describes. (796) Old Wells Road where Owen Evans and Cordelia live runs across the top of Edmund’s hill, and has been mostly preserved from development; little grassy lanes run eastwards from it

through orchards, paddocks and allotments to the fields beyond, and there is probably more of a feeling here of Glastonbury as she used to be than anywhere else. The lane leading to Edmund's Hill pottery where Owen Evans sits ruminating on heap of turnips and struggling with his demon is also still a little grassy lane with dandelions growing down the middle. It is tempting to think that some manifestation of Merlin has saved this small area from modern development. Now, as then, few people go to Edmund Hill unless they live there, and it plays very little part in the public life of the town; it is an unusual tourist who is aware of it at all.

THE BUILDINGS *The Abbey Ruins*

Besides the Tor and Chalice Hill, it is the Abbey ruins in the very centre of the town that visitors to Glastonbury come to see.

Except on part of the west side, the precinct is hidden by the houses of the four streets that developed long ago in a square around it; it is an amazingly peaceful centre to the busy streams of traffic on all four sides. But the abbey ruins play as small a part in *A Glastonbury Romance* as they do in the lives of most Glastonians to-day; of the might, the splendour, the culture, the skilful administration, and the religious passion that the Abbey housed for eight centuries, it is only the last, and the Abbey's visible remains, that interest Powys.

Looking at "the great broken tower columns of the vanished nave of the Abbey Church", Mary Crow wonders "would other girls, all the way down the centuries . . . look up at those two stupendous pillars and fill the space between them, in their sad imagination, with the high carved arch full of wafted incense and choir-echoes and deep-voiced prayers?" (278) She is about to



return to Abbey House when suddenly she sees "above the bounding wall of the enclosure . . . the coracle-like crystal shell of the crescent moon in her first quarter". (278) There follows an amazingly subtle discourse linking the moon "with her silvery horns of Mystery gathered in the folds of that blue robe or bearing up those divine feet of the Maid-Mother of the Crucified" to the Virgin Mary as she appears in many a medieval hymn and illustration. (To Mary the Abbey was dedicated.)

On the morning of the Pageant when she is again looking at the ruined arch Mary has a second almost visionary experience; indeed it is implied that she has seen a version of the Grail. That this should happen to Mary is particularly interesting as she is very much a Modern Miss who, before these experiences, has said to her friend Tom Barter, "Glastonbury doesn't suit me any better than it suits you, though I have, I confess come to like these ruins a little better than we did at the beginning. Do you remember how we hated it all, Tom?" (274) But, in spite of herself, she has Madonna like qualities; for she is worshipped by both John Crow and Miss Drew.

On Maundy Thursday, the night of a riotous and plentiful supper for the choir, it is again from the ruined arch that something supernatural yet strangely probable seems to emanate, the Image of the Man-God of the West, mingled with the faint wailing "drifting through the high trees of King Edgar's lawn, from those myriads of dead medieval throats", "indestructible emanations of the wild liturgical calls of the old tune, 'Save us from Eternal Death. Save us from Eternal Death', that these carved stones had known, vibrated forth over the smooth lawns, over the treetops . . ." (376) Of all Glastonbury's inhabitants only Sam becomes aware of this Image—with disastrous consequences to himself.

The Abbey ruins are the setting for a thoroughly disturbing event for Sam—his father's jealous diatribe against his behaviour to Nell. Over the north doorway are four concentric rings of carving suggest-

ing all forms of earth life; set thus in stone they echo the contrast between Matt Dekker's stern dictate of renunciation and his real feelings of lust. (320)

Apart from these startling incidents, the abbey precinct features as a pleasant place for lovers like Sam and Nell to meet, for Angela Beere, to sketch, Louie Rogers to read or Tom Barter to stroll. To-day it still has these contrasting atmospheres, the dramatically religious of the architecture and the pleasantly mundane of the grounds.

Abbey House and the Vicarage

Two houses in Glastonbury, the Abbey House, which is the very largest of all, and the Vicarage, have high walls fronting on the road. Behind these walls live the two most repressed characters in *A Glastonbury Romance*, Euphemia Drew and Matt Dekker. At the back however the Abbey House is more or less open to the Abbey grounds and the Vicarage is more or less open to Chalice Hill, the centre in the novel, as we have seen, of all the "psycho-sensations" due to delight in Nature. The symbolism in the significance of these dwelling places is complete. The difference between the life style of the spinster, Miss Drew, at the Abbey House, and the bachelor Dekkers, father and son, is partly emphasized and partly accounted for by the difference in their servants, the pretty and proper Lily and Louie Rogers of Miss Drew, and the ugly and earthy, scandal-mongering Penny Pitches and Weatherwax of the Dekkers.

In spite of the events of the story in which Miss Drew's companion Mary Crow leaves her to marry John Crow, and Nell seeks temporary refuge at the vicarage until just before the Grail's "mandate" that Sam should return to live with her and their child (982), the indications are that the life styles of the two occupants of these walled houses will finally not change much. For after Mary's departure Miss Drew becomes fond of Crummie Geard, still suffering for love of Sam, and will probably ask her to be her companion as Mary's successor (978); and before Sam has a chance to implement the



St John's Vicarage, Glastonbury.



The gateway to Abbey House.

Grail's mandate, Nell has returned to Will Zoyland, and leaves a note to Sam asking him to come back again to live with his father, "now that I'm gone". (984) The dramatic irony of the plot here is reminiscent of Hardy; but when we see Sam again and for the last time, he is very happily helping his father punt a huge boat to rescue victims of the flood; the irony here is purely Powysian.

*15 Northload Street and
Mother Legge's house*

The symbolic significance of dwelling place is also apparent in the office and lodging of John Crow. His office is by the station; he is newly arrived and won't be staying. Glastonbury Station was on the edge of the moors, and the road leading directly to it from the town is Benedict Street but the terraced houses there were newly

built in the 1930s, of Glastonbury brick, variously styled and often three storied; trees lined the pavements of the wide road, and it was a pleasant, practical, respectable place to live, not too out of keeping with the style and purpose of Miss Elizabeth Crow. But John, the seedy, penniless stranger was more appropriately housed in a rented flat in the narrower, much older and more dubiously respectable Northload Street.

Number 15, where John Crow had rooms is demolished now, and the space it and several others occupied is used as a coach and car park, so Northload Street retains its ancient character as a place of arrivals and departures. Even standing on the ground where Number 15 used to be, it is still possible to see “the pollards and poplars and reedy ditches” (388) on the levels towards Sharpham, one of the few places in Glastonbury not on a hill where you can get an idea of the surrounding land; it is doubtful though, whether you could see a light from Abel Twig’s window even from a top window; too much building now intervenes. But Powys’s stress here on John’s delight in the moors and marshes, “the benediction of those vast level fields” (388), as opposed to the “monkish phantasms”, then associated with Glastonbury, is arresting when we consider the keen interest now taken nationally in the Somerset Levels.¹⁶ It was towards all the Neolithic trackways only fairly recently discovered that John Crow was looking. Here, as so often, Powys shows an insight into where people’s interest will lie fifty years after he is writing.

As one looks in vain for 15 Northload Street so does one for “Cardiff Villas” and “The Elms”. Suffice it say that the houses of Street Road and of Wells Road are, in the main, of similar character and with similar occupants to-day. And the same is true of Abel Twig’s house; many of the houses on the moors are still make-shift but as their owners get rich by digging up more and more peat instead of running small holdings the older dwellings are increasingly replaced by solid breeze-block bungalows.

In Abbey days, Northload Street, and

Paradise which it leads to, were the way from one of the landing stage areas of the Abbey; most of the Abbey’s business was conducted by boat and barge because much of the surrounding area was marsh. There is record, for example, of the abbot’s wine having to be guarded all night at Northload if there was not time to unload it before dark.¹⁷ This area would have been like a small port with goods of all kinds arriving from the abbey’s extensive lands. As at all ports, a brothel area developed beside it, often, as here, called Paradise, and here lives Mother Legge who lets rooms to unwed couples. Whether Powys had any evidence for saying that a house in Paradise once belonged to the Camel family and before that to John Atwelle I have been unable to discover. Powys is quoting Leland¹⁸ direct when he tells us, “This Atwelle did much cost in this church and gave fair housing that he had builded in the Towne unto it”. John Camel is mentioned by both Collinson¹⁹ and Leland, and Collinson tells us that he was purse-bearer, whatever that may have been, to one of the abbots. Leland mentions no other persons individually in his section on Glastonbury, so it is probable that John knew only Leland, and not Collinson. One feels that had he known that John Camel was the abbot’s purse bearer he would have found it hard to resist mentioning it.

Although perhaps typical it is none the less interesting that Powys attaches the only specific local history he seems to have been aware of to Mother Legge’s house. That she should call her house “Camelot” is probably on a par with “The Camelot Inn” nowadays; the name is chosen for its sound of romance. It is more significant that Mother Legge is the first and perhaps the only person, except Mayor Wollop, that Sam tells, albeit more or less by accident, in detail about his vision of the Grail; and that it is to Mother Legge that Young Tewsey, entirely by intention, takes his wonderful catch; for Mother Legge has been interested in the fish long before Tewsey caught it (736), and she is interested in all that Sam tells her about the Grail; her response is much more serious

than anyone else's. Her whole-hearted interest in the Great Chub of Lydford is explicitly contrasted with the worldly Philip's (735), the kind naturalist Sam's (739-40) and the mythologically-minded Owen Evans's (739-40), and her questions about the Grail are worthy of a philosophically-minded theologian (961-62). Sam was probably not the only person whose tongue in her house "became unloosed as it had rarely been unloosed in his life before" (489). Paradise was "overbuilt" quite recently, is being "overbuilt" again now, just as Powys in *A Glastonbury Romance* says that it had been then (489), and no doubt will be again; but a personality like Mother Legge is contained in something much less specific than a mere building.

The River Brue

There are two supernatural visitations in *A Glastonbury Romance*, Sam's vision of the Grail (939), and John Crow's vision of Arthur's sword returning to the river (359), and they both happen on the same stretch of river from Pomparles Bridge to Cold Harbour Bridge.

When Powys tells us,

the road John followed now may have been as old as the days of the Saxon King Ina whose charter to the Benedictines of Glastonbury is still extant; but the chances are that in those early times all cautious travellers leaving Glastonbury for the south followed the Roman Road, the remains of which lie less than a stone's throw away from the one upon the surface of which John's stick was now so sharply and so motivelessly tapping (357),

he is probably referring obliquely to John Morland's excavation of 1921 in which this Roman road was discovered.²⁰ When he tells us that Pons perilis was mentioned in a Court Roll of the fifteenth century he is no doubt right; it was probably mentioned in more than one. When he says categorically that it is the place where Arthur threw away his sword, the statement is wide open to question; not only was it Bedevere who threw away Arthur's sword, at least in Malory, but it can not be said that it hap-

pened in any particular place. Nevertheless Leland tells us that it was here at "a Bridge of Stone of 4. Arches communely caullid Pontperlis" (one of the many variations of the name that Powys quotes) "wher men fable that Arture cast in his sword".²¹ Thus Powys juggles in a very human and humorous way with a wide range of sources to lend credibility to the tale as he chooses to tell it.

Before his vision, John is feeling "a strange vibration of malignant revolt against the whole panorama of earthly life", the feeling which Powys imagines to have been Arthur's when his last battle lost, his knights dead or away on the Grail Quest and his wife untrue, he commands Bedevere to throw away his sword;

this particular action of this singular Person must have been one that was accompanied by some convulsion of human feeling in his own mind parallel with the shock in Caesar's mind when he crossed the Rubicon, or in Alexander's mind when he slew his friend Clytus or in our Lord's mind when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane. (359)

John Crow is in good company!

It is typical of Powys in this novel that this airy speculation should be followed by a factually accurate description of the course of the river Brue on either side of the point where John had his vision; we are told precisely where the path he is about to follow will go "between Cradle Bridge Farm, and Beckery Mill, across Glastonbury heath under Cold Harbour Bridge, by Pool Reed Farm till it reached the village of Mere", and precisely where it has come from: Cow Bridge, South Moor, Kennard Moor, Butt Moor, West and East Lydford. The mention of Lydford is not insignificant, for it is the great chub of Lydford that Young Tewsey catches near Cold Harbour Bridge. The effect of the juxtaposition of fact and fancy is that they borrow something of each other's quality; the speculation seems to be rooted in reality and the landscape becomes, to use one of Powys's key words, "porous".

The place of Sam's vision of the Grail is just as exactly described, "half a mile North East of Cradlebridge and half a mile South of Cold Harbour" (938) so it would have been very near or perhaps right beside the landing stage where John finds Nelly Morgan being teased by the rest of her gang, (364) and then sees,

this little group of children . . . under a sudden illuminated aura. He saw them as a recurrence, a recurrence of a human group of vividly living bodies and minds, with cuckoo flowers and hedge parsley and dock leaves and river mud gathered about their forms as if arranged there by a celebrated artist. The badness of the children, the sweetness and charm of the children, with these spring growths all about them and a solitary invisible lark quivering in the blue seemed to carry his perturbed spirit beyond some psychic threshold where the whole pell-mell of the mad torrent of existence took on a different appearance. (368)

It is to be assumed that something about the searing experience of the sword vision makes possible this change of mood from revolt to acceptance.

Sam's vision has a similarly reconciling effect although his mood before it is quite different from John's; for some months he has been having "recurrences of unaccountable transport in which his whole being seemed caught up and transfigured . . . objects which served to evoke this ecstasy were so varied in themselves and so insignificant" (935); such is Sam's exalted state of mind that not even visiting the Bagge family, which would be a thoroughly depressing experience for most people, saddens him. That he should be so sensitively excitable is probably entirely plausible psychologically, for Sam has been living, physically and mentally, the life of a medieval saint. His normal earthy, sluggish temperament is explicitly contrasted with John's more mystical and mercurial one (934-35). Moreover, John has previously led a life of self-indulgence so far as his purse would allow, whereas Sam has been helping other people at his own inconvenience and against

his real inclinations—things that John Crow would never do.

But in spite of these differences in temperament and mood there is much in common in Sam's and John's visions besides the place where they happen. Just as John, looking at the dead cat in the Brue, before his vision, thinks of the world's pain, so Sam kneeling in the mud by the old post, "seemed to catch upon the breathing wind, mingled with the gurglings and suckings of the water, the cries of pain which at that second all over the world, were rising up" (937). Just as John then moves closer to the river to see more clearly, Sam following the chain attached to the old post comes to the little coal barge. (938) It is at this point that Sam's bearings are precisely fixed just as John's were: "All these places lay behind him as he sat in that barge on the Brue, for his face was turned directly towards the three eminences of the Isle of Glastonbury, Wirral Hill, Chalice Hill, and the Tor" (938). It would seem to be part of a plan that John, immediately after his vision, walks north towards the Lake Village so that he like Sam, and like Geard when he drowns, is to the west of the town. It is a view which visitors and most local inhabitants never see. Although a sizeable road runs beside the river for most of the way between Cold Harbour and Pomparles, it is not much used except by an occasional lorry carrying peat or animal food. The fields on both sides of road and river are pasture; there are only traces now of the tow path on the northern bank where John Crow walked but it is perfectly passable. Although Glastonbury is a crowded little town these days, I have never met another person either walking or fishing on that bank. Even geographically Powys takes us to the unusual amidst the familiar.

Between the point where Sam sees his Grail and Geard drowns, is Cold Harbour Bridge, and "it was quite close to this spot that Philip was standing" (732) "discussing his new bridge with the Taunton road contractor and a land surveyor from Evercrech" (722). Almost incredibly when I first consciously visited this spot a year or

two ago a new very solid steel bridge had almost been completed just about where Philip's would have been. In getting to know well a fairly small area, as it is to-day and as, so far as one can discover, it has been in the past, one realizes with amazed satisfaction, how often the same things are done in the same places. The tenants of Glastonbury Abbey, for example, kept horses at Sticklynch for the use of the monks. When we first arrived there was a large riding school at Sticklynch Farm. After several years it closed and one regretted a break with tradition. Within a few years, however, a *newcomer* opened a livery stable at Sticklynch Manor. Such incidents give credence to Powys's "smooth grooves of fate". (733)

In talking of Cold Harbour, "an unimportant little bridge", Powys gives no inkling of how he knew that "there was as a matter of fact, no geographic section of the environs of Glastonbury that had not been so often the stage of portentous human encounters . . ." (733) But it is quite likely that he is right; for it is at this point that the mill stream rejoins the Brue, and it is also at this point on the Brue that the Wells, Glastonbury, and Sharpham boundaries meet. From the beginning of man's inhabitation of the Somerset Levels fish had been an enormously important item of diet. Taxes were paid in fish; an early abbey record²² states that one Radulfus de Northilade was to pay thirty salmon every Feast of the Assumption of St Mary as rent for his holding. By far the lengthiest entry in the *Rentalia and Custumaria of Abbot Michael of Amesbury*,²³ Abbot of Glastonbury from 1235-1252, concerns the Abbot's boatman, Robert Malerbe; amongst other duties,

if he meets in the water anyone fishing who has caught white fish he ought to take half for the use of the Lord Abbot and carry it to Glastonbury . . . and if he comes upon eel fishers with traps he must choose from the trap whatever eels he likes and carry them to the Abbot's cook.

Where the difference between being in one man's water and another's is but a step it is

easy to imagine the disputes that would arise; disputes between Wells and Glastonbury were particularly involved and bitter and frequent.

A poor man catching a great Chub of Lydford in abbey days would certainly not have held it up for all to see as Young Tewsey did (733), but he might have taken it, well wrapped up, to the Abbot, in the hope of reward or preferment; a man wants such an achievement properly appreciated in the most appreciative quarter; Young Tewsey hurries to present his to Mother Legge.

The nature and siting of this incident make it likely that Powys was familiar with *The Rentalia and Custumaria of Abbot Michael of Amesbury* in which the duties of the Abbot's boatman are described. It was the fifth annual publication of the Somerset Record Society which began in 1886 and to which Phelps of Montacute was a subscriber from the beginning and for many years afterwards. He was also a subscriber to its parent body, the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society from 1888 onwards in which the Somerset extracts from Leland's *Itinerary* were published in 1887. John Cowper Powys records in *Autobiography* that Phelps was always friendly to him, so these volumes would have been available to him in the Montacute library.

West Pennard

The happenings described in *A Glastonbury Romance* in two other areas of the Abbey Estate lend support to this probability. A list of tenants in *The Rentalia and Custumaria* has a section called "Outside Havyatt", which both from its geographical situation and its position in the record under Glaston XII Hides and before East Pennard, and the names of the tenants which refer to hamlets in West Pennard, must refer to West Pennard itself.²³ In being "outside Havyatt" West Pennard was in a sense "beyond the pale", and to the older inhabitants of Glastonbury West Pennard still has an aura of disreputability, of a place to go for an afternoon if you were up to no

good, and Pennard Hill is still almost as unfrequented as Powys describes. (789) It is here, in a ruined sheepfold, that Mad Bet and Finn Toller plot the murder of John Crow, and are overheard by Owen and Cordelia Evans, out for an afternoon's walk.

Finn Toller is stupid and insensitive enough not to be afraid to express the sadistic streak that Owen Evans also has but is virtuous enough to struggle to suppress. If she had been as lovelorn as Mad Bet, Cordelia thinks that she herself would become as mad. (794) Thus this law-abiding couple find on their afternoon's outing a couple as "beyond the pale" as they are afraid of being themselves; no wonder they return, thoroughly shaken, to their decent home. Being called upon by the town's new politicians, Paul Trent, Red Robinson and Dave Spear, restores them to a sense of normality; Owen Evans is especially reassured when he finds that Paul Trent knows the Welsh legends.

Whitelake River

The northern boundary of West Pennard is the Whitelake River. Along this river in the days of the abbey's full glory the abbot's wine was brought in flat-bottomed boats from the vineyards at Pilton.²⁴ As women worked in the fields in those days, escorting the wine must have given the lay brothers a rare chance of amorous dalliance. In *A Glastonbury Romance*, the Whitelake river is the site of most of the scenes describing sexual love, a suitable setting for the cottage of the beautiful Nell Zoyland, "that silly little fool", in the words of the more subtle Mary Crow (397). Here Nell arouses the illicit and expressed passion of Sam Dekker, and the even more illicit and suppressed passion of his father, the vicar. Here Will Zoyland enjoys adulterous dalliance with Eudoxia Pippard and Persephone Spear, and overcome with drunken, irresponsible desire, throws his nominal son's christening cup into the river, a gesture full of symbolic implication, and here even the sharp and



Whitelake River and the Tor from Whitelake Bridge.

moody Persephone attains “an irresponsible trance of amorous happiness”. (903)

There have been no monks at Glastonbury for four hundred and fifty years but there are still vinyards at Pilton. Nell’s cottage has gone but startled herons still fly up suddenly, and occasionally lovers kiss on Whitelake Bridge where the view to the Tor is particularly dramatic.

To the initiate, *A Glastonbury Romance* and the Glastonbury landscape enhance each other to a high degree. Very truly has Elizabeth Barrett said, “Surely nothing could be more particularly localised in *A*

Glastonbury Romance than Glastonbury and its environs”,²⁵ and “The phenomena of place—the power of *genius loci*—is crucial in *A Glastonbury Romance*.”²⁶ In the *Romance* whatever happens in any particular place is consistent with the historical and legendary tradition of that place, and often with its present atmosphere.

Moreover, Powys always tells us exactly where people are, in places appropriate to their character and state of mind; for the novel is, at least partly, structured on the topography of Glastonbury.

NOTES

**A Glastonbury Romance* (1932): page references within my text are to the London: Bodley Head, 1955, edition which is identical with the London: Picador, 1975.

¹ John Cowper Powys, *Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*, 2 vols., ed. Malcolm Elwin, London: Village Press, 1975, vol. 2, p. 93.

² *Ibid.*, p. 101, and Belinda Humfrey, ed., *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1972, p. 324.

³ *Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*, vol. 2, p. 102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵ *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, p. 325.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

⁸ *Autobiography*, London: Macdonald, 1934, p. 117.

⁹ Geoffrey Ashe, ed., *Quest for Arthur’s Britain*, London: Paladin, 1971, p. 123ff.

¹⁰ M. Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, London: Macdonald, 1946, p. 28.

¹¹ Michael Dames, *The Silbury Treasure*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1976.

¹² Geoffrey Ashe, *Avalonian Quest*, London: Methuen, 1982.

¹³ *Wolf Solent*, London: Macdonald, 1961, p. 388.

¹⁴ J. Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, p. 114.

¹⁵ Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Grail. From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1963, p. 267.

¹⁶ Bryony and John Coles, *The Sweet Track to Glastonbury. The Somerset Levels in Pre-History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986. Winner of the 1986 British Archaeology Award.

¹⁷ *Rentalia and Custumaria of Abbott Michael of Amesbury*, Somerset Record Society, 1889, vol. 5, p. 177.

¹⁸ *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 1888, p. 75.

¹⁹ H. Collinson, *History and Antiquities of Somerset*. 3 vols., 1791. New edition, Robert Dunning, 1986, says the original subscribers constituted a list of the nobility, gentry and clergy of Somerset and Glos.

²⁰ *Proceedings SANHS*, 1921.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1888, p. 76.

²² J. E. Jackson, ed., *Liber Henrici de Saliaco*, London: J. B. Nichols, 1882, p. 2.

²³ *Rentalia and Custumaria of Abbot Michael of Amesbury*, Somerset Record Society, vol. 5, p. 123.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁵ *The Powys Review*, 13, p. 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Margaret Woolf

J. C. Powys's *Autobiography* in the light of *The Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*

John Cowper Powys's *Autobiography*¹ is unique even within such a flexible genre, for it deliberately omits much information which most autobiographies emphasize. Powys rarely mentions his writing, for example, and gives little attention to famous contemporaries and world-shaking events. Moreover, in a striking reversal of the usual process, Powys depicts himself in the *Autobiography* as an irresponsible charlatan and wildly exaggerates his deficiencies and peccadilloes. Yet his correspondence, particularly *The Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*,² reveal a sensitive, loving and generous man. These letters are of particular interest since they cover that period of Powys's adult life described in the *Autobiography*.

The Powys of the *Autobiography* is sadistic, selfish, lecherous, malicious and irresponsible—a caricature sinner. This “master-trick” of caricature, in fact, provokes the reader's disbelief in the sinner and, instead, enlists his sympathy for the delightful eccentric. The *Letters to Llewelyn* reassure us that our sympathy is not misplaced. Here we see John Cowper Powys as son, brother, husband, father, lover, friend. In all these relationships his behaviour is exemplary. The evidence of Powys's loyalty, generosity and sense of responsibility is overwhelming, and cannot be fully illustrated in this brief discussion.

Louis Wilkinson interprets the self-disparagement of the *Autobiography* as evidence of John's masochism.³ There are, however, other, more cogent reasons for the discrepancies between the writer of the *Autobiography* and the John Cowper Powys we know from other sources, particularly the man revealed in the letters to Llewelyn, with whom he had a special

intimacy. For example, a major problem for the autobiographer is that the truth of the past he seeks to record has been distorted by memory into fiction. When, as here, we have contemporary evidence such as the *Letters to Llewelyn*, which, for the sake of this discussion, I will call “fact”, it will undoubtedly differ in many respects from the “fictional” product of the author's memory. But, as Powys proposed to write a “story” about the “struggle of a soul” rather than a record of achievement, he turned this potential danger of the form to advantage.

Another reason for these discrepancies is that a basic tenet of Powys's philosophy was the sparing of the feelings of others. Powys tells Llewelyn, that, to ensure that no-one's feelings will be hurt, he is: “planning all sorts of original devices certainly never used in any autobiography before. The only villain of the curious fairytale will be John.” (II, 159) And, in the work itself, he says, “my instinct has led me in this “Autobiography” to treat myself as if I were one of my own fictional characters” (641). To write one's autobiography is to reorder the raw materials of “reality” and, in effect, to recreate one's life. And here we have the privilege of watching an extraordinary mind creating its own “reality”.

Powys never forgot “the intolerable hurt” his self-respect suffered at school, and, throughout his life, went to extravagant lengths to avoid damaging the self-esteem of others. It was at school, too, that John learned to use his acting abilities, and to exploit the reputation he had acquired as a “Loony”. Again, although happier at Cambridge, Powys left having learned nothing but: “a most formidable mental

power of *hiding up my real identity* until I could get away alone” [my emphasis] (A, 201).

Perhaps because of that longing for “ordinary life” which he felt so strongly when at school, Powys married when he was only twenty-four. Although he enjoyed the new experience of being a householder and, later, a father, the reader of the *Autobiography* is surprised to find him referring to his marriage as “singularly happy”, since earlier he speaks with loathing of the “reproductive sexual processes”. It is unlikely that, with this attitude towards sex, Powys’s marriage could have been happy for either partner. In fact, there is a good deal of evidence from the letters to Llewelyn that the marriage was not happy. Margaret Lyon, Powys’s wife, seems, judging from John’s scattered references to her in these letters, to have been an ordinary enough young woman, and it cannot have been easy for her married to such a flamboyant and irritatingly compulsive person as John. It was probably good, for Margaret at least, that much of Powys’s time was spent away from home.

Despite his apparent revulsion from active heterosexuality there is absolutely no evidence that Powys was homosexual or even bi-sexual. His horror of fully consummated sex notwithstanding, he knew that his love of feminine beauty meant that he was not—and could never be—a homosexual. He tells us that when he once considered homosexuality: “The light went out; the air grew chill” (A, 221). Moreover, there were usually one or more girls to whom Powys was “romantically” attached. However, this revulsion from the sexual act itself would explain the “cerebral” nature of these affairs and it is surely not surprising that a young man who grew up in a Victorian parsonage, where open discussion of sex was unlikely, was appalled when he finally learned about it. Seen in this light, those “perversities”, “manias”, “wicked lusts” and “viciousness”, referred to in the *Autobiography*, seem to be no more than the natural desire of a Victorian young man to stare, without restriction, at the only parts of the

female body that he *knows* are different from those of men—ankles and calves. That others of his generation developed “normally” does not make Powys’s failure to do so “wicked”. Powys was, as he tells us, neurotic, hypersensitive and excessively fastidious.

Powys himself seems never to have written anything disloyal about his wife. Even in his letters to Llewelyn John’s unhappiness is never explicit, and he avoids direct criticism of Margaret. Moreover, when planning his permanent return to England, accompanied by Phyllis Playter, he writes several letters to Llewelyn expressing his anxiety about the embarrassment this might cause his wife and son (II, 177). But Llewelyn was often jealous of anyone who came between John and himself and regarded John’s efforts to please his wife, and everyone else, as “spiritual insincerity”. Indeed, he once wrote to John: “Your soul feels at peace under masks, you, disguised under a Jesuit’s hood, are content to offer false wafers to a false congregation.”⁴

But this sensitivity about the feelings of others was an important part of Powys’s philosophy. Replying to a complaint from Llewelyn about the archaic style of Theodore’s letters, John says: “these fantastic speculations are to him his expression, they are his life-illusion! When you destroy a life-illusion you commit the one unpardonable sin. I have done it—I cannot be forgiven—I destroyed my wife’s illusion of ‘love’” (I, 86). Powys, borrowing the phrase from Ibsen, used the term “life-illusion” to describe the way in which a person secretly regards himself, the ideal self he has created by the power of his imagination. “Let us” cries Powys, “hug fiercely and obstinately each his own life-illusion! Let us build up from our own soul our own separate, unassailable universe.”⁵

If Powys really felt that he had destroyed his wife’s “life-illusion” this would do much to explain the feelings of guilt which he obviously suffered from for much of his life. These feelings were so strong that, at one time, Powys came close to entering the

Roman Catholic Church. Instead, he resorted to “fetish-worship”, superstition, and a determination never to hurt anyone or anything. In the *Autobiography* Powys constantly refers to this basic tenet of his “philosophy of life”: “I felt that every organism in the world ought to be fed, comforted and ‘jollied along’, and that, any number of ‘lies’ were lawful” (466). Obviously, if a person with this cast of mind engages in the writing of an autobiography, he can find no better way to highlight the goodness and sanity of others than to depict himself as a selfish rogue, as guilty of disgusting perversions, as a charlatan, a fool and, perhaps, as insane.

A further uncommon reversal is found in the *Autobiography*, in that just as Powys exaggerates his faults so, for the most part, he minimizes his sufferings. In 1917, Powys does say that he came nearer to insanity than ever before, attributing his misery to the war. But the letters show that, although some of Powys’s mental agony *is* attributable to the war, it is actually the result of more immediately personal factors, such as separation from Llewelyn and increasing financial worries. I am not suggesting here any deliberate falsification on Powys’s part, any attempt to ennoble a self-centred emotion by vague generalization and abstraction. This would be totally foreign to the spirit of the *Autobiography*, in which there is more self-excoriation than glorification. But, in the clutches of a despair so profound, a misery so pervasive as was Powys’s at that time, it is well-nigh impossible to analyze objectively the components of the condition.

Powys complains frequently of exhaustion in the letters he writes to Llewelyn at this time. In September 1917, he says that he longs to visit Frances but that even so short a journey seems “an awful effort”. A week later he writes: “I find I have very little energy. I keep trying to start a new novel but my driving force seems to have ebbed” (I, 234-35). But Powys was not only recovering from major abdominal surgery when he wrote these letters, he was also worried

about his future; demands for his lectures were few and he longed for a permanent job which would relieve him from the exhausting journeys these American lectures involved. Although the reader of the *Autobiography* suspects that the life of an itinerant lecturer was not ideally suited to a man who suffered from gastric ulcers, it is impossible to realize the extent of Powys’s suffering or to appreciate fully his courage and endurance without the letters to Llewelyn.

On the contrary, the overall impression gained from the *Autobiography* is that this life offered a welcome escape from responsibility and a golden opportunity for the parson’s son to kick up his heels and enjoy the unconventional life of the *déclassé*. But, anyone who supposes that Powys was irresponsible, either emotionally or financially, will find plenty of evidence to the contrary in the letters to Llewelyn. It was Powys’s strong sense of responsibility which drove him on. For example, in 1918 he writes: “If I had no family all would be well. I can make enough with the few lectures I have to keep myself quite comfortable. It is my family that worries me” (I, 245). In fact, Powys was, apart from his first few years in America, almost always short of money. But, when John did have money he spent it freely on his family and friends. And, later, when in need himself he worried about his inability to help them. Writing to Llewelyn in 1917, when his own health and spirits were at a low ebb, he is worried not only about his wife and son but, also, about Louis and Frances and his manager and agent, Arnold Shaw (I, 235). Nor was John’s generosity confined to his family and friends. He was always ready with encouragement for aspiring writers and a ready welcome for all who called on him. No letter went unanswered, although he often had little time left for his own work. There are countless examples of this loyalty, generosity, and acute sense of responsibility in both volumes of the *Letters to Llewelyn*, all of which belie the picture of himself which Powys paints in the *Autobiography*.

John felt, as Llewelyn said, “at peace

under masks". For he was, as he tells Louis Wilkinson, "*Born an actor and a born actor, even when absolutely alone is self-conscious*". Related to this need for masks is Powys's freely admitted tendency to tell people what they want to hear; he himself calls it flattery: "And such is my nature that I *cannot* stop flattering & shall flatter till I flatter Theodore's *John Death!*"⁶ A less biased observer than Powys himself might call this kindness, generosity, or tact, especially as we know that Powys regarded it as a positive and benevolent act "to flatter [his fellow men] into self-complacency and well-being" (A, 466).

Readers of the *Autobiography* will notice the comparative gravity of the *Letters to Llewelyn*. An essential ingredient of the *Autobiography* is the robust humour, the exuberant self-parody, without which it would be hard to endure the spectacle of a sensitive man stripping himself naked, before what must often be an unsympathetic eye. The generally serious tone of the *Letters to Llewelyn* becomes even more noticeable when we compare them with the *Letters to Louis Wilkinson*, where John the "zany" is at his best, the zest for life as strong as ever, the words barely able to keep up, it seems, with the flood of thoughts, ideas, opinions, sensations, and questions. During the period covered by these letters (1935 to 1956), four of Powys's brothers (including his beloved "Lulu") died, as well as a much-loved sister, his wife, his only child and many of his closest friends; and yet, despite these losses, he wears the mask Louis expects to see.

A striking example of Powys's desire to tell people what they want to hear is recounted in the *Autobiography*. Powys had gone to England, in June 1918, to join the army but was rejected as physically unfit. After his return to America he was asked why he was not in uniform, to which he replied that he was afraid of German bayonets. But Powys tells the reader that, if he had been "*absolutely accurate*", he would have confessed that his worst fear was of urinating in public (601). It is evident from his letters to Llew-

elyn that he was, indeed, very concerned about the possible conflict between his excretory functions and military routine; and as Powys says, he could hardly mention urine before "such ladies". But, it is also entirely possible that Powys was telling his questioner what she really wanted to hear: namely, that he was a coward. In fact, the letters to Llewelyn show that John tried very hard—not "feebly" as he writes in the *Autobiography*—to join the British army.

Powys's sense of duty is also evident from the fact that it was he to whom his brothers and sisters often turned at times of crisis. Indeed, the first two letters in Elwin's collection are John's carefully considered response to a cry for help from a confused and unhappy Llewelyn—then an adolescent. It was John who prevailed on his father to send Llewelyn to Switzerland. And, just as he had persuaded his father to allow his brother, A.R.P., to enter Harry Lyon's office, he was instrumental in helping his sister, Marian, leave home for America. Powys was, obviously, very concerned about the welfare of his brothers and sisters and was often chosen by them as an intermediary.

Powys's thoughtfulness and his determination to hurt no one demanded the exclusion of a great deal of material from his *Autobiography*. While appreciating the honourable motives for these lacunae, one must regret them. An enormous and important part of Powys's life is missing, for, save for casual acquaintances and his description of the beautiful "boy-girl" of his Venetian adventure, Powys mentions no women. The reader expects, reasonably enough, that the *Letters to Llewelyn* will fill in these gaps. But, although we learn the identity of the "boy-girl" [Frances Gregg], we are not very much wiser about Powys's mother or his wife than we were before. Their mother, for instance, is rarely mentioned in these letters. Powys is certainly more critical of his father in the letters than he is in the *Autobiography*. But he also tells Llewelyn of his longing "to walk again with Father". And, in the final chapter of the *Autobiography*,

Powys sums up—in the light of his own experience and from the strength of his own “life-illusion”, his feelings about his father. For all his faults, John says, he was, in Hardy’s words, “a good man and one who did good things” (648).

We can certainly say of John Cowper Powys, despite his claims to the contrary, that he, too, was “a good man and one who did good things”. Powys rarely bore a grudge, even when he had great provocation. For example, though many of his friends were outraged by Wilkinson’s caricature of him in the *Buffoon*, Powys was not. Llewelyn wrote a cutting letter to Louis in 1916 when the book was published, and returned to the subject years later. Powys’s manager, Arnold Shaw, agreed with Llewelyn that the book attacked John, but Powys wrote to Llewelyn that he was more disturbed about the unpleasantness of a “row” between Louis and Arnold than he was about the book itself (I, 202). In fact, John liked the book and saw no malice in it. In spite of all Powys’s references to his own cruelty and malice in the *Autobiography*, it is difficult to find any evidence of these vices in other sources.

Llewelyn, in particular, could say almost anything to John without provoking him. But, once, responding to a letter from John about Phyllis Playter, he went too far and John reacted indignantly to his jibe that John was “a comic figure in California” (I, 321). During one week John wrote four letters in response to this, defending his right to indulge in “shameless sentimentality” and, at the same time, implying that Llewelyn’s own attitude towards women was derived from Louis Wilkinson: “the attitude that reeks of masculine sweat and scoffs at ‘degeneracy!’” (I, 317).

Powys’s own “degeneracy”—those vices and perversions hinted at in the *Autobiography*—is, judging from these letters, nothing worse than an immature attitude to sex, associated with impotence. He tells Llewelyn: “girls as girls are very thrilling and very exciting, and if my reactions to such excitement take a cerebral and sentimental

form rather than a ‘rogering’ honest cod form, I can only plead that nature has made me so. Nature gave me (as you know) a somewhat un-Browningian Aaron’s Rod. I loathe the other method. I shrink from it. It destroys my life-illusion”. And, for once, John defends himself—berating Llewelyn for his “hirsute bluster” and “*Smart Set* sarcasm”. But, even in these letters, John’s hurt and his feelings of betrayal are more evident than actual anger.

John notices, too, that Llewelyn did not object to what he now calls “meretricious rhetoric” when it was addressed to himself: “on the various occasions when I have expressed my feelings to you about you, they didn’t strike you as so shallow!” The reader also wonders about Llewelyn’s sudden objection to “meretricious rhetoric”, since the “shameless sentimentality” of the letters written to Llewelyn during his first illness does seem excessive. In one letter Powys likens himself to Peter at the Last Supper and Llewelyn to Christ (I, 55). Similarly, hearing that A.R.P. is a prisoner of war, Powys writes: “Oh God protect him—don’t allow them to crucify him, as they did your only son!” (I, 251-52). Since we know Powys’s opinion of God the Father—“an insulting mockery”⁷ is one of his milder epithets—what are we to make of such an invocation? These letters are “sentimental” and the rhetoric is overblown, but the sentiment itself is not “meretricious”. The style is—if I may borrow a phrase from Professor Blackmore—John’s “dialect”, especially when writing to Llewelyn. But perhaps it is best to let John speak for himself—again responding to Llewelyn: “You say I write too much—too abandon[ed]ly. I am an unrestrained and howling kind of person—but not to everyone, Lulu” (I, 321). As for the invocation to a God he does not believe in—Powys would invoke any deity, pagan or Christian, when in need. The irrational and imaginative must call on someone or something, and must invent as Powys did, headbangings and “worry-trees” to fill the gaps left by a loss of faith and religious ritual. Indeed, in the last published letter from

John to Llewelyn we find the touching exclamation, "D.V. Touchwood, Touch Wood D.V." (II 284).

Powys's indignation at Llewelyn's accusations that his emotions about Phyllis are "superficial", together with the suggestion that John has loved "so many" is certainly justifiable, for of the three young men, Louis, Llewelyn and John, who were "in love" with Frances Gregg in 1912, only John continued to love her. His concern and love for Frances are constant themes of the letters he wrote to Llewelyn over the years, a concern that continued even when John had met Phyllis—the ideal companion with whom he was to spend the rest of his life.

This is the man, then, who, in his *Autobiography*, claims that he has no heart, that he is "cold and non-human", the "sadist" who can not even read the account of Nancy's murder in *Oliver Twist*. This is the "rogue" whose love and friendship once given never failed. This is the "charlatan" who inspired thousands with his own love of

literature. "Caricaturing" understates Powys's treatment of himself in the *Autobiography*. There is no "villain" in this "fairy-tale", only a sensitive, loving man in search of his identity.

Those who hope to find in the *Letters to Llewelyn* corroboration of the "vices" Powys claims in the *Autobiography*, or even evidence of hypocrisy, will be disappointed. For, just as the *Autobiography* is the chronicle of a man's inner life, it is just this inner life which is most illuminated by the *Letters to Llewelyn*. They provide a running commentary on that "struggle of a soul with the obstacles that hinder its living growth" which is delineated in the *Autobiography* (46). As Powys himself said of Elwin's projected biography of Llewelyn: "You see of course there's Lulu to me—Lulu to you—Lulu to—, to—, to— at least a dozen Lulus, & then finally there is Lulu to Lulu" (*LLW*, 157). The *Autobiography* is John Cowper Powys's search for that final John, the "real" John, the John who is John to John.

NOTES

¹ John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography*, London: John Lane, 1934 (re. Macdonald, 1967, and Picador, 1982). All further references will be given in parentheses as *A*.

² John Cowper Powys, *Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*, 2 vols., ed. Malcolm Elwin, London: Village Press, 1975. All further references will be given in parentheses as *LBL*.

³ *Welsh Ambassadors*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1936 (re. London: Village Press, 1975), p. 64. Further references will be given in parentheses as *WA*.

⁴ Malcolm Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, London: Macdonald, 1946, p. 171. All further references will be given in parentheses as *Life*.

⁵ John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Happiness*, Gerard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius, 1923; London: Village Press, 1974, p. 12. Further references will be given in parentheses as *AH*.

⁶ John Cowper Powys, *Letters to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*, ed. Louis Wilkinson, London: Macdonald, 1958, p. 130. All further references will be given in parentheses as *LLW*.

⁷ See John Cowper Powys, *The Art of Happiness*, Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius, 1923; London: Village Press, 1975, and *The Religion of a Sceptic*, New York: Dodd, Mead, 1925; London: Village Press, 1975.

Frederick Davies

Recollections of John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter: Part Two*

I should like first to give a fuller account of the Civil List Pension episode which I mentioned in my letter to the Editor of *The Powys Review* a few years ago (Number 13). I do so after some consideration, since it involves revealing certain financial matters disclosed to me by Phyllis. However, several people have told me they think it important that these facts be put on record since they show so clearly the very remarkable person Phyllis Playter was.

To begin, however, I must describe Waterloo Terrace, Blaenau Ffestiniog. It is a small grey-stone building comprising two small houses. John Cowper and Phyllis went to live in Number One in 1955. Number Two was occupied by Mr and Mrs Roberts. Mr Roberts died a few years after I came to know John Cowper and Phyllis. Mrs Roberts was always a most helpful neighbour to Phyllis. The house is in a short narrow winding lane leading off the High Street. The two front doors lead, straight from the lane, into a small space just large enough for the front door to open. To the left of this small space is a door leading into the one room downstairs—behind which is the tiny kitchen with room only for a sink and a gas stove. Off the tiny kitchen is a narrow W.C.

Opposite the front door, narrow stairs lead up to two rooms. The room at the front contained two sets of shelves of books and a couch. The couch was beside a small low window which looked out onto the mountains and it was here that J. C. P. wrote on a board across his knees. After he died Phyllis gave me that board. It has faint squiggles and doodles on it and faintly here and there are scratched the letters "J. C. P.". Among

the many books was a complete set of the *Dictionary of National Biography* which Phyllis told me was among J. C. P.'s favourite reading now.

The room downstairs was about three paces wide and five to six paces in length. It contained another couch (at the end opposite the small window), a small dresser whose cupboards served as the larder, two small easy chairs, and a small chest of drawers in which Phyllis kept her possessions including photographs, cuttings from newspapers and magazines, and a large number of tiny notebooks whose pages were of very thin paper. In these notebooks she copied in minute handwriting sentences or whole paragraphs from the enormous number of books she read, mostly borrowed from the local public library.

There was no table. The only table in the house was a narrow little one in the kitchen. Phyllis ate off a low stool beside one of the armchairs. J. C. P., on the couch, ate off a tray, but during the last year of his life he subsisted chiefly on Complan and small cups of milkless tea into which he enjoyed dropping lumps of sugar one at a time and watching them dissolve.

On the wall above the couch was hung a very big wide mirror which made the little room appear twice its length.

I had naturally wondered whether it had been from choice or necessity that these two old people had divested themselves of so many material possessions. Many years later, when she was living on her own in that little miner's cottage in Blaenau Ffestiniog, Phyllis told me they had paid just over £150 for it when they had moved there from their rented house in Corwen and that they had had to sell all J. C. P.'s manuscripts and all

*A talk given to the Powys Society, August 1986.

the letters he had received from well-known people.

But whether it was from choice or necessity, it was obvious to me that they were living on the borderline of poverty. Louis Wilkinson, also, had told me he was concerned about their financial state, that his own novels had brought him far more money than John Cowper's had brought him, and that—though John Cowper and Phyllis did not know it—J.C.P.'s publisher, Mr Eric Harvey of Macdonald's, was so concerned he had recently out of his own pocket been sending J. C. P. royalties that his books had not earned. I also took them food and cigarettes for Phyllis each week. These were always accepted by Phyllis gracefully and gratefully.

This, then, was the background against which I received a letter from George Steiner.

Churchill College,
Cambridge.
November 24 1962

Dear Davies,

The enclosed speaks for itself. Please see what you can do, and let us act quickly, if possible. I need not say how important Sir Frank's voice is or how utterly we can rely on his discretion. I wait to hear from you.

Cordially,
George Steiner

Enclosed was a letter from Sir Frank Lee, Joint Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, explaining that it would be necessary for Mr Powys to sign the attached forms in order to receive a Civil List Pension.

In the correspondence I had had with George Steiner, after Phyllis suggested I wrote on their behalf to thank him for his part in the B.B.C. Broadcast on John Cowper that year, no mention had been made about John Cowper's financial circumstances. This cryptic letter from him and its enclosures confirmed that other people were also concerned about those circumstances and were trying to do something to relieve them. If they thought I was the best

way of getting the forms to him I had to take them. I did so the following Sunday. With hindsight, I realise I should have known how they would be received by Phyllis.

When I came to explain to John Cowper and Phyllis what the forms were, I would not have believed that Phyllis could become so angry. I had betrayed their friendship. They had never accepted charity and never would. She refused to listen to my attempts to explain it was not charity but a recognition of great merit. John Cowper sat looking as frightened as I felt. When Phyllis turned and went out into her little kitchen, he gave me a smile and a gesture with his hand as if to say "Leave it at that". Then he beckoned me to come and sit beside him.

When Phyllis returned, having made some tea, the matter was not referred to again. But when I came to go she made a point of saying something which at the time I took to be, not an apology, but an attempt to heal any hurt which her very sharp words may have caused me. She said, "During our long time together, Jack and I have sometimes given our friendship to people who have hurt us deeply by writing about our life together. I know, Frederick, that that is something you would never do." Later I realised it could also have been a warning. If it was, it was a warning I have not disregarded until now—over four years since I stood beside Phyllis's coffin in Bangor Crematorium. After a few days I wrote saying how sorry I was that I had been quite unintentionally the cause of upsetting her so much. I had the following reply.

December 4th 1962

My dear Frederick,

You wrote such a nice letter received this morning, I only hope I shall write one that will affect you in the same harmonious way—I have felt very sad and upset about the whole business—and George Steiner's reply to my letter makes me wonder if the matter had not been set in motion long before you took any part in it and it was very wrong to blame you for it.

Please don't think that I feel I am *right* and you were *wrong*. It is only a question of having to act in accordance with one's own nature—and more frequently paying a penalty for it than not.

You acted quite rightly in accordance with yours but when it meant I had to act contrary to mine *I* reacted accordingly. But what is really the crux of the matter—in following John Cowper in his approach to the end of his life everything is diminishing—and I can't simultaneously go in the opposite expanding direction. That is why I long to keep out of action and decisions and precipitating new events.

Yours always,
Phyllis

In 1967, four years after John Cowper's death, Phyllis discussed her financial situation with me and told me she had decided she could no longer afford to go on living at 1 Waterloo.

She told me that in June 1955, when they moved from Corwen to Blaenau Ffestiniog, they had sold most of their possessions, including a lot of first editions given to John Cowper and some of his manuscripts and letters from well-known people. They had paid £156 for the little house in Blaenau and had almost nothing left until a few months later when Littleton Powys died and left them some money. That had almost gone when I raised the matter of the Civil List Pension with them. When she had refused to consider accepting that, a large number of people led by Angus Wilson and George Steiner had contributed a substantial sum of money as a gift to John Cowper. Gilbert Turner had brought it to them and John Cowper had accepted it. So when John Cowper died he left about £6,000 to her.

She had spent a considerable amount of that on her three months' voyage to South America in 1964 and now—in 1967—she had nothing to rely on except her old age pension of £9 a week and the little interest that accrued on what was left in the bank. (She said, incidentally, she never knew why she was allowed an old-age pension, since

she was still an American citizen, and felt guilty at drawing it each week.)

She had read about the Abbeyfield Homes and asked me to get particulars of them for her. I did so and she liked the sound of the Abbeyfield Home in Warwick. So it was arranged for her to go there with Mrs Penny to see it and to interview the Secretary there. A week later Alyse Gregory died and left Phyllis a large sum of money—over forty thousand pounds.

Phyllis had liked the Abbeyfield Home at Warwick and been offered a place there, but now she felt unable to accept it and so deprive somebody who had more need of it than she now had herself. She therefore decided to stay on at 1 Waterloo. However, as the years went by she became increasingly unwilling to spend the money Alyse had left her, saying she felt it must go back to the Powys family. I remonstrated with and told her that Alyse had left it to her to make her old age as comfortable as possible. She did make occasional visits to London, going to the theatre and visiting art galleries. Occasionally also she stayed a couple of nights in Liverpool and we would always go to the theatre there. In the winter she would sometimes leave 1 Waterloo and spend a couple of months at an hotel in Maentwrog or Bath or London. Nevertheless, when she died she left nearly £35,000 of the money which Alyse had bequeathed her.

Here are two letters Phyllis wrote at this time. The first is to arrange the date for a visit to me in Birkenhead. The second describes her return journey to Blaenau by coach. Both refer to what she believed to be her pending move to the Abbeyfield Home at Warwick.

1 Waterloo
Blaenau Ffestiniog.
August 7th 1967

My dear Frederick

Shall I come to Woodside next Thursday, August 10th, or would it be better to leave it until later? I am going to Warwick next Thursday the 17th to see the Abbeyfield secretary (and for him to see *me*) and I rather

think you go off to Venice about the 18th. But if it should be convenient, let me know. I am enjoying the Rilke letters now I have got into them. I hope you had a good journey to Salisbury and back.

Phyllis.

1 Waterloo,
Friday August 11th 1967

My dear Frederick,

It was beautiful last night coming back with the new moon at first hardly apparent and then low and golden over the mountains. But O what a long way—especially between Denbigh and Llanrwst—I thought of how many times you have taken it to see me and I wondered how you have ever done it.

I did enjoy seeing your books and the pictures and the house so fresh and attractive. The street and the houses have such an air of settled life going on *as it used to be*—with no innovations. I have been thinking of it all day—with all these moves and changes confronting me.

You gave me a revelation over Donatello—and I see the Holbein as clearly as if I were in the room with it still. I felt very wide awake when I went to bed last night and got down my French Spinoza whose pages disintegrate—all loose—while you read it, and compared it with the English text you gave me. I must say the English seemed as satisfactory as the French—perhaps it was very well translated?—“the wavering mind” being equally good if not better than “fluctuations”. There is a great deal I could say—but it will have to wait until I am installed in my room in Warwick (if it is destined to be there) where I hope I shall have uninterrupted and undistracted days—the lodestar to lead me on through this present disruption. But I find it very fortifying to read Spinoza.

I mustn't write more and must force myself to do some of the things that have to be done, but last Thursday is suspended in my mind—out of the mêlée—

“la vie est là
simple et tranquille”

Let us hope I shall find it also. I am glad you will soon be in Venice.

Phyllis.

* * *

I come now, partly by means of letters from Phyllis, to the events leading up to and immediately following John Cowper's death.

Briefly, the main dates are: 11 May 1963 when Phyllis was taken suddenly to Llanudno Hospital and underwent two major operations and when Mrs Isobel Powys Marks came up to Blaenau Ffestiniog and arranged for John Cowper to enter a private room at Blaenau Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital—not because he was ill but because there was now nobody able to look after him as Phyllis had. By 1 June Phyllis was well enough to be moved to a room next to John Cowper's in Blaenau Hospital. In the early hours of the night of 16-17 June John Cowper died. Phyllis remained in Blaenau Hospital convalescing until 9 August. On 28 August I drove her to Mappowder, and then drove her and Mrs Penny on to Morebath in Devon to stay for a week with Miss Gregory.

I will begin with a letter from Phyllis dated 1 May 1963, written in reply to one I had sent to her on my return from Salisbury where I had been visiting my sister. I remember that when I opened the envelope and before I had read the letter, I was struck by the sudden deterioration in her handwriting.

May 1st 1963

My dear Frederick,

It was nice to have your letter and to hear the news of your journey south.

You will be *amazed* to hear all the events that have befallen us in the interlude. I got “gastric flu”—a terrible illness. I am not right yet and whether it was due to my illness or whether it affected J. C. P. too in some kind of way—he has had a sort of collapse. I have got a trained nurse who comes every day and that has solved many things. J. C. P. is better and looks very well and is quite comfortable and content—but our whole life has turned into a régime of nursing and formidable nursing at that.

If you come next Sunday it will be a sick room visit—and I don't think it would be worth the long drive. Visitors are out of the

question at the moment but I don't regard you as one and it would be nice to see you. But it doesn't seem worth coming so far under the circumstances. Besides you might *get* this gastric flu—two people have refused to cross the threshold when they found I had it. It came on on the 15th of April—some time ago—but I am still suffering from it.

Do as you feel inclined about coming Sunday—you needn't let us know.

Yours always,
Phyllis.

I went, of course. It was the last time I was to see them together in their little house. And it was to be the first time Phyllis had left J. C. P.'s side for over twenty years. After his death Phyllis told me that.

May 10th 1963

My dear Frederick,

Thank you for your letter and for "Elektra" which came. What a good jacket! It looks very good and I shall be very interested in reading it. I have not had a moment to read in Peace—but I read the first page of the Prologue about (Greek & indecipherable)—which is uppermost in my mind at the moment. For they insist I shall go into hospital at Llandudno tomorrow morning. John Cowper's niece will be here by afternoon—and the nurse and a neighbour will be here until she arrives.

It is *sad*. It seems to me it will be the end of everything. But perhaps not. We may all be as we were in a few weeks' time. I *feel* better—but they do not trust me to get well on my own accord.

If you want to write, J. C. P.'s niece's name is Mrs Isobel Powys Marks. John Cowper is pretty well considering all the disruption and he likes the little house very much and is used to it, and his niece and sister will have to work things out as best they can.

I'm glad we both saw you before this final upheaval,

Love always,
Phyllis.

May I take the Elektra to the hospital to start with? I guess you can get things off from the hospital and I will post it back to you before long.

This, and the next letter, were the only ones out of the many hundreds of letters Phyllis wrote to me which she ended with "Love always, Phyllis." Her usual ending was "Yours always, Phyllis."

Llandudno Hospital
May 27 1963

My dear Frederick,

Thank you for your letter which came this morning. Every day they spring surprises on you here—perhaps it is the same in all hospitals. They told me about eleven this morning I was to go to the Blaenau Hospital tomorrow—then a littler later, not until Wednesday. But at any rate I hasten to let you know so you won't come all this way for nothing.

We shall meet in Blaenau—all three together again—either Thursday or at the weekend. I am getting on wonderfully well—am now allowed to eat everything and if I can stay in the hospital until the wound doesn't need dressing and I am able to cook for myself—things will work out very well.

I will give you your books back when you come to Blaenau.

Love always,
Phyllis.

Phyllis was in Llandudno Hospital from 11 May until the beginning of June when she was moved to Blaenau Memorial Hospital to recuperate, and occupied the next room to John Cowper. John Cowper had gone into Blaenau Hospital, not because he was ill, but because there was no one to look after him as Phyllis had been able to.

While Phyllis was in Llandudno Hospital I drove to visit her every Wednesday evening and every Sunday. On Sundays, after visiting Phyllis, I drove on to Blaenau to see John Cowper at the hospital there. I continued reading to him each Sunday what I had written of my novel during the week—and then to them both when Phyllis joined him there. She was able to get up and sit with him in his room.

While in Llandudno Hospital Phyllis underwent two major operations.

Memorial Hospital,
Blaenau Ffestiniog.
June 6th
Is it the 6th?
It is Friday.

My dear Frederick,

Thank you *very much* for sending "The Observer". I read every word, you know. Smith's utterly failed me and delivered only one daily paper. I never knew when the Pope had died. But now I have discovered that the very nice woman who comes every morning to clean will pick it up for me and I will have it just after I finish breakfast—the ideal moment. I learned this was her day off—after breakfast this morning—and tried to reconcile myself to another day without one—when lo and behold *another* cleaning woman came and laid the Telegraph on the bed. She had told her.

Perfect day after perfect day continues to follow each other. I am sinking so far back in this privileged régime that I am losing all desire for it to come to an end. And I shall feel that I am being thrown on to the harsh world when I do leave.

Did you get that paperback of Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River* in Liverpool? Or on your trip to London and Oxford? If you could get a copy for me *where you are* would you bring me one? We have copies but I would enjoy it here—and I would like to give one to my American friend who lives in Spain and is coming to see us before long. I don't suppose she has one there. Don't go to any trouble—it is only if you can pick one up at hand.

I hope your journey south was enjoyable and has sent you back refreshed.

Yours always,
Phyllis.

* * *

From W. E. Powys.
2 June 1963 at Malindi

My dear Mr. Davies,

We do so thank you for visiting and watching over, and for giving us the latest news of, my Old Brother John and my Sister Phyllis Playter. All your reports to Lucy come on to me at once.

Gerard Casey and Mary (my niece) will be in England next month. We would very much like to move them both to Dorset, if they are well enough. Lucy thinks Jack could be moved in a helicopter.

I am so glad that Phyllis is a little better. What a good thing she went to Hospital just in time I understand.

Yours very sincerely,
Will Powys.

* * *

The following week, during our half-term holiday, I visited Mrs Penny and Louis Wilkinson in Dorset. They both asked me to do what I could to persuade John Cowper and Phyllis to come to live in Dorset since they both knew what a great burden Phyllis now had to carry—especially during the long winters in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Mention again was made, as in Will Powys's letter to me, of using a helicopter to bring John Cowper all that way. When I returned home I wrote to Phyllis and received the following reply (written six days before John Cowper died).

Memorial Hospital,
Blaenau Ffestiniog.
June 11th 1963

O Frederick what a long letter you have written just after that long journey back! And all the week's teaching ahead of you the next day. What burdens fall on you—as they do on me! I do nothing but write letters—when I would so much rather read.

But I do see you must have felt apprehensive that I would think you were taking a hand in our affairs again! This is a very nice plan—that we should go to Dorset—but it is totally beyond my power to take on a new house and a new neighbourhood. After all I do know the ropes where we are after eight years—and it's easier to bear the ills one knows than fly to others that one knows not of. I would have to attempt it if J. C. P. wanted to go—but as far as I can tell—he doesn't want to. He is now so much in a world of his own that external phenomena hardly exist for him any more. He has forgotten everything about 1 Waterloo—but I do know now, after two weeks of being

with him here, that he wants to go “*home*” (wherever that is) rather than stay on here.

Winters are winters wherever you are in this country—what about the 10ft walls of snow on the road from Mappowder to Buckland Newton last winter? And we have everything arranged for our habits and requirements here which couldn’t be the case in a new house. The idea of J. C. P. going in a helicopter did make me laugh.

But *really* Frederick—think of your saying I would find it restful to get away from the mountains for a while! Even with all these innumerable journeys to Blaenau you have made, you must have no idea how even *in eight years* they are engraved like Mary 1st’s Calais in the innermost heart of these inhabitants who travel back, or long to travel back, across half the world to them! I don’t expect to live all the rest of my life with them—but I shall always miss them!

You did put all you had to say very happily and well. You have a gift for doing that always. And what a gift to have!

No—there is no one coming next Sunday that I know of and we shall be pleased to see you if you can face that long drive with the school week ahead of you next day.

Yours always,
Phyllis.

There seems to be a non sequitur in Phyllis’s reasoning in this letter. I do know that several times she had said how puzzled she was why John Cowper had wanted to come to such a grim, forbidding place as Blaenau Ffestiniog. But I know also from many comments she had made that she personally had never wanted to live in Dorset. That aversion may have contributed to their decision in 1935 to move from Dorchester to North Wales—and to the above non sequitur.

Phyllis’s remark that John Cowper was now living in a world of his own needs a certain qualification. John Cowper Powys had always cultivated the ability to live in a world of his own: the world of his imagination. Primarily, this had been a means of escape: escape from himself and from people he found antipathetic.

Very occasionally during my visits somebody called on them unexpectedly while I was there. The difference in John Cowper’s

reaction was sometimes very noticeable to me though probably not to the visitors. On one of these occasions he withdrew into himself and I understood what Phyllis had meant when she had once recalled to him how disgracefully he had behaved when they had had an unexpected visit from the author of “*Science for the Citizen*” and “*Mathematics for the Million*”, whom they had never met before. Phyllis told me, in front of John Cowper, that she had never had such an embarrassing hour in her life. John Cowper had refused to speak to their visitor and Phyllis had to make conversation until he could make a reasonably dignified departure. Obviously, it had been their visitor’s very successful attempts to popularise Science among ordinary people which had made him completely antipathetic to John Cowper.

At the opposite extreme to this was the occasion when somebody arrived unexpectedly with a little boy about three years of age. John Cowper was transformed. He did not have to say much: there was certainly no “*baby-talk*”—he treated the child as an equal. But it was his face, his eyes, his smile, his laugh which created such a magnetic field that that child was drawn into it with obvious delight. John Cowper held out his hand and the child ran to him.

So that when Phyllis said he was now living in a world of his own it was true if she meant that his memory was now becoming increasingly weaker and that he was living more and more in the present moment. But it should not be taken to mean that his mind was not still extremely active and that when he *wanted to* he could show he was exceedingly aware of what was going on around him.

It was as if, when he withdrew into himself, part of him was *watching*, watching everything that went on—as when, that evening we thought he was dozing, he was the only one of the three of us who noticed that the clock had stopped.

And his memory had become more erratic than feeble. Three weeks before his death he asked me if I had a copy of Walt Whitman’s

poems. I said I had and he asked me to bring it the following Sunday. I did so—on Sunday, 2 June. When I visited them on Sunday, 16 June, I saw it—open—on the table beside him. I had brought with me, as usual, my children's novel to read to him. But that Sunday it was not possible since I found with him, not only Phyllis, but also his niece Mary, Mrs Penny's daughter, and her husband Gerard Casey—who were back from Kenya for a short time.

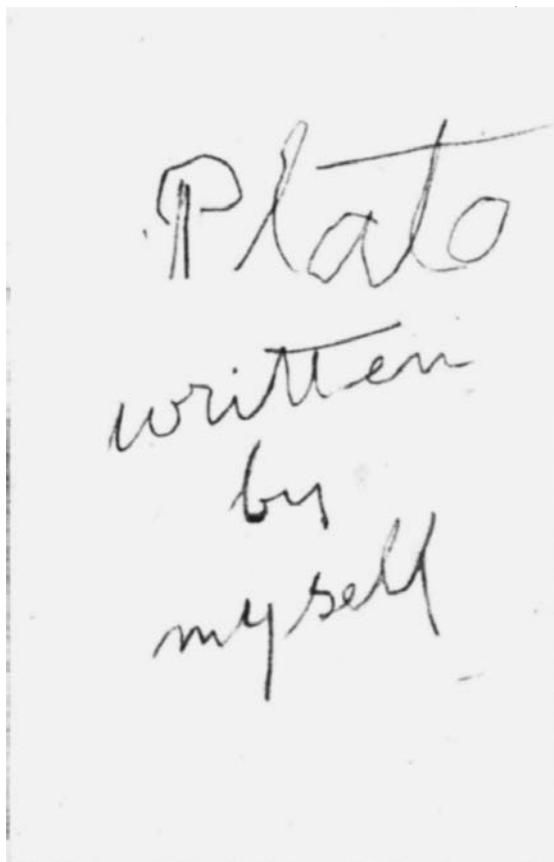
That afternoon the subject of a move to Dorset was brought up. The possibility of John Cowper's being moved there by helicopter was mentioned. John Cowper was listening. As I watched his face, I knew he would *never* agree to that.

Next day Monday, 17 June, I heard on the one o'clock news that he had died in the early hours of the morning.

When Phyllis gave me back the copy of Walt Whitman's poems, I found a piece of paper inserted at page 126. On it was something written in pencil by John Cowper—in large shaky handwriting. He had also drawn a wavering line in pencil in the margin beside some of the lines of the poem on page 126. The poem was "Sea-Drift". The lines he had marked read:

O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,
Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to
open my mouth,
Aware now that amid all that blab whose
echoes recoil upon me I have not once
had the least idea who or what I am,
But that before all my arrogant poems the real
Me stand yet untouched, untold, alto-
gether unreach'd,
Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock-
congratulatory signs and bows,
With peals of distant ironical laughter at
every word I have written,
Pointing in silence to these songs, and then
to the sand beneath.
I perceive I have not really understood any
thing, not a single object, and that no man
ever can,
Nature here in sight of the sea taking
advantage of me to dart upon me and sting
me,
Because I have dared to open my mouth to
sing at all.

On the piece of paper inserted at the page on which he had marked these lines, John Cowper had written four words: "Plato written by myself".



A man of ninety who, perhaps the day before he died—certainly within a few days of his death, could look for and find those lines of poetry in a book of 507 pages and could write those words *and* leave them beside the lines he had marked in the book, knew, I think, what he was doing and why.

But here I enter the realm of conjecture. Did John Cowper will his own death? There are I think grounds for considering such a possibility. Firstly, he died the night after he had heard it suggested that he be moved to Dorset by helicopter. Secondly, Phyllis told me afterwards that no medical reason had been found for his death. Thirdly, in his Diary for 20 March 1932 he records that Phyllis had had the worst dream she had ever had in her life. She had dreamed that

they had both decided he must die. And he records that he said that that would be easy if he willed it. In that, he said, he was like Mr Geard. Fourthly, we have John Cowper's fascination with the word "esplumeoir" which, in *A Glastonbury Romance*, he defines as meaning ". . . some Great Good Place, some mystic Fourth Dimension, or Nirvanic apotheosis, in which the magician (Merlin) deliberately sank, or rose; thus committing a sort of inspired suicide, a mysterious dying in order to live more fully." And fifthly, there are the lines Phyllis wrote to me only a few days before he died: "He is now so much in a world of his own that external phenomena hardly exist for him anymore. He has forgotten everything about 1 Waterloo—but I do know now, after two weeks of being with him here, that he wants to go 'home' (wherever that is) rather than stay here." And lastly, as I have just said, a man of ninety who, perhaps the day before he died, could find those lines by Walt Whitman in a book of 507 pages and could write those few words on a piece of paper and leave it in the book beside the lines he had marked—I

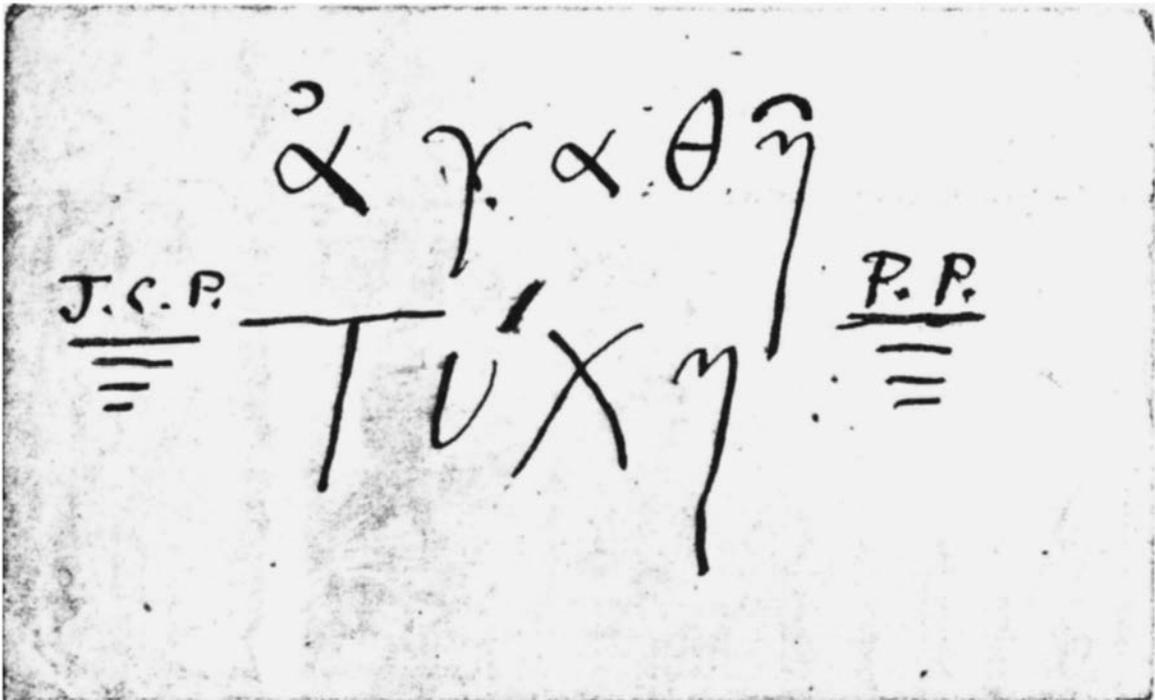
think that man knew what he was doing and why.

During my visit to Phyllis on the Sunday following John Cowper's death she gave me a piece of paper on which she said John Cowper had written in Greek what she had meant to him. She wanted me to have it—to keep—but not to show it to anyone until after her death. I remember she said she would not attempt to tell me what it meant since no one version could convey all its undertones and overtones. Recently I asked Gerard Casey if he would translate it for me and he has given me permission to read his reply.

20th July 1986
Mappowder

Dear Frederick,

Your welcome letter has come and brought Lucy and me much pleasure. We are very pleased to have this copy of J. C. P.'s "billet doux" to Phyllis. I am interested he has arranged it in the form of a cross—so that all the symbolic associations of this geometrical form—it appears of course through the



ancient world and long before our particular Christian use of it.

Handwritten symbols: α θ ζ γ and T U X γ

means Good Fortune and was the name for “good luck”, “kindly providence”, “divine blessing”, “happy chance”, etc., etc. and was later identified as a popular deity by the Romans with the goddess Bona Fortuna . . . all these ramifying significations are implied in J. C. P.’s emblem for Phyllis.

I would say it is quite all right to use it if you wish in your talk at Bath . . . it is a happy symbolic summing-up of their relationship as understood by John!

Warm regards from us both,
Gerard.

* * *

Finally I come to the circumstances which led to my first meeting with John Cowper and Phyllis Playter. I am loth to admit as possible the explanation Phyllis later give to them: that John Cowper had called me to him.

In 1961 I was Head of the English Department at a school on the Wirral Peninsula. During the Easter holiday that year I was asked by the member of staff in charge of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme if I would help in the organisation of an endurance test by driving into North Wales to see the pupils participating in the test through one of the check-points.

Early one Saturday morning I drove to the check-point near Bettws-y-Coed. By about 2 p.m. all the half-dozen or so boys had reported to me. I no longer remember at what time that morning it occurred to me that Blaenau Ffestiniog was not far from Bettws-y-Coed. I do know that when I started out that morning I had no thought whatever of venturing to call on John Cowper Powys. Nor would I have ever have set out with the intention of driving to Blaenau Ffestiniog to try to visit him. For many years I had regarded him as one of the great liter-

ary geniuses of the century. That, and the fact that he was then eighty-eight years old, would have made any premeditated approach unthinkable.

I had, however, not long ago read the recently published *Letters to Louis Wilkinson* and Powys’s unusual address had stuck in my mind, 1 Waterloo, Blaenau Ffestiniog. On the A5, just outside Bettws-y-Coed I came to a road sign-posted “Blaenau Ffestiniog 9 miles”. Before I knew what I was doing I had turned off the A5 and was driving along that road to Blaenau Ffestiniog. I found that it went over the Crimea Pass amid some of the wildest and most rugged scenery in Britain. I had never been to Blaenau and my heart sank as I came to the steep descent to it between high slag heaps of slate. I entered a long, winding, narrow high street which seemed to go on and on forever. On its left rose cliffs with huge boulders and rocks apparently precariously balanced above the shops and houses immediately below them.

I drove slowly along that winding street, debating whether to stop and ask somebody where I would find the street or road named Waterloo. Everywhere looked grim, grey and forbidding and gradually my courage forsook me. Even if I found his house, what would I say? I decided to drive on and out of Blaenau Ffestiniog. But as I drove on and away, as I thought, from John Cowper Powys, I remembered I had run out of cigarettes. I saw a small general and newsagent’s shop on the left and, as there was no room to park in the narrow high street, I turned quickly into a lane beside the shop, drew up and went in.

I bought the cigarettes from the lady behind the counter. I was almost out of the door again when, on impulse, I turned and asked her if she knew of a road named Waterloo. No, she was sorry she didn’t. There was one called Waterfield. I said it didn’t matter. I was looking for a man who wrote books. She said the Post Office might be able to help me. I thanked her and was about to close the door when she called out: “But it is not the poet gentleman you are

looking for, is it? Mr. Powys?" I said: "Yes, that is his name."

She came to the door and pointed up the lane. I had stopped almost outside the little miner's cottage where he lived. There was no road or street called Waterloo. Waterloo was the name of the small grey-stone house divided into Nos. 1 and 2. I hadn't even to move the car. Within a minute I was knocking at the door and a small frail-looking lady in black had opened it. I asked if it might be possible for me to pay my compliments to Mr Powys. She said he was old now but she would see. What happened then I have already related—and how when Phyllis long afterwards recalled the strangeness of that first meeting she said: "Later I realised Jack had called you to us. I don't know how I would have managed that last year of his life without you."

I don't think about it. To do so, opens up too many possibilities. I only know that that day things seemed to have been taken out of my hands. I just did what came next. What is most uncanny is that I really was leaving Blaenau without stopping. And then to have stopped—just for some cigarettes—almost outside his house. Like John Cowper, Phyllis remained quite a heavy smoker until shortly before her death. Unlike John Cowper, she did not merely smoke half of each cigarette. He used to keep the long "dog-ends" in a tin and tramps used to call every so often for them. I have since given up smoking. But if I had not been quite a heavy smoker myself that Saturday when I set out to drive to a check-point near Bettws-y-Coed, I should never have met John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter.

John Cowper once told me he firmly believed that if something is meant to happen, for good or ill, it will happen. He also said that one could help more good things than ill to happen by a machiavellian preparing of the ground and sowing of the seed. It pleased him to envisage a possible affinity between himself and Taliesin, Plato, Merlin, but I sometimes think that perhaps the strongest affinity lay between himself and Odysseus.

I cannot conclude these not, I hope, too random recollections without referring to something which both John Cowper and Phyllis shared: their sense of self-mocking humour. This trait is very evident throughout John Cowper's Diaries. It continually appears in Phyllis's numerous letters to me. Here is an instance at the close of the last letter she wrote to me from Blaenau Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital where she had continued convalescing after John Cowper's death.

July 16th 1963

My dear Frederick,

I do hope you got home before too late on Sunday. I am sorry you didn't get off sooner.

I have been reading the book by Constance Rourke—but I am a little disappointed in it. I have always meant to get it, and perhaps expected too much, or rather something different. I don't feel drawn to those early or even later American humorists—comedians—Yankee backwoodsmen—though I have (naturally) a great feeling for American humour: and trying to fit all American writers (even *Emerson*) into her theme rather limits any illumination she might shed upon them. But I am very grateful to you for giving me a chance to read it.

It is now Wednesday morning and the surgeon has come and gone. He didn't suggest any more of his drastic concoction to 'dress' the wound—and seemed to think it was practically healed. So I imagine I shall have conged at last.

I think it is very nice of you to bring all those Sunday newspapers I missed, and I shall read them when I get safe back to my room. Don't ever think I take your willingness to do anything for me for granted. 'I don't miss it'—as we used to say at home. I find being with people very irksome at the moment—but being with you is very soothing.

It is another rainy cold day and I have turned on the electric stove in desperation—my teeth were chattering—or rather would have been had they not been absent.

Yours always,
Phyllis.

Lucy Amelia Penny (née Powys) 1890-1986

Glen Cavaliero, Gordon Wynne, Margaret Woolf

Mrs Penny, neé Lucy Amelia Powys, the youngest of the eleven Powys children, that is, sister of John Cowper, T. F. and Llewelyn, died on 7 November 1986 in her ninety-sixth year. She will be much missed by many students of the works of the Powyses, not least the Editor of *The Powys Review*, for her benignity, her unstintingly kind help, her thoughtful interest and suggestions, and for all her sensitivity, intellect and intelligence. Obviously, there will be many good words written of Lucy Powys in years to come. For the time being, for the *Review*, Gerard Casey, Lucy's son-in-law, has sent us our initial quotation and a copy of the sermon delivered at the funeral service in Mappowder parish church. The sermon is flanked by two further tributes representative of Powys students at home and abroad.

Lucy Powys's only publication is a description (three pages) of her brothers and sisters, written for *The Powys Newsletter*, Number 6, 1983 (Colgate University Press, Hamilton, N.Y.); this confirms and fills out the portrait which emerges in our pages here.

B. H.

Glen Cavaliero Lucy Amelia Penny 1890-1986

“Beauty, Truth and Rarity,
Grace in all Simplicity . . .”

G. C.

Of the ten Powys brothers and sisters, Lucy, the youngest, probably enjoyed the most tranquil and outwardly uneventful life. She was born at Montacute Vicarage and lived there until her marriage in 1911 to Hounsell Penny, after which her home was at Horsebridge Mill on the River Test, in Hampshire; here her daughter Mary was born. In 1938 the family moved to

Shootash, near Romsey, where Hounsell died in 1945. In the following year Lucy went to live with Mary and her husband, Gerard Casey, on their farm in Kenya, returning to England in 1948, in order to live with Katie Powys at Chydyok while their sister Gertrude was in Africa. In 1950 she moved to Mappowder, the Dorset village which was already the home of Theodore Powys, and where she was to spend the remaining thirty-six years of her life. She was subsequently joined there by Gerard and Mary, who occupied the adjoining



Lucy, 1915.



Lucy Amelia Powys's wedding to Hounsell Penny, 22 April 1911: the wedding group is outside Montacute Vicarage: three Powys brothers (excluding Littleton, Llewelyn and Theodore) and three sisters can be seen in the back row.

cottage, and by her niece, Isobel Powys Marks. Visitors to Mappowder at that time would find themselves welcomed into a community, of which Lucy was the heart.

I first met her in 1960. She was by then nearly seventy years old and I was thirty-three, but at once she treated me as a friend. I had called on her that October day at the suggestion of John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter, and on my naming them her welcome was instantaneous. And warm: she made you feel you were the only one who existed for her at that moment. Her beautiful white silky hair framed a face of great nobility and sweetness of expression, a typically Powys countenance with her glowing brown eyes and generous mouth.

We talked together for some time in the front room of her cottage, with its red brick floor and plastered walls, the latter covered with paintings by her sister Gertrude and her brother Will. But she soon insisted that,

after I had seen the church and Theodore's house, we should visit Katie, who now lived at Buckland Newton. That village lies some distance from Mappowder, and as we drove along the narrow, bending, hilly lanes, I became ever more incredulous that my elderly companion should regularly bicycle all this way, even to see a sister to whom she was devotedly attached. And yet that devotion was to be attested still more triumphantly when in a winter of deep snow she actually walked that distance, fighting her way through drifts that made the road impossible for motors, so as to reach the by-now ailing Katie's bedside. She possessed all the family toughness and ability to face harsh weather. "Oh, it *was* exciting!" she exclaimed.

That first visit was memorable for me, but I did not see it as being necessarily repeated. However, a couple of months later there came a letter from the two sisters, expressing

the hope that I would call again. The bulk of it came from Lucy, concluding characteristically with "together this evening, sitting by the fire—It's very good after my ride through the fog and rain." That letter was to be the beginning of a friendship which was to last a quarter of a century more.

Since her death I have been reading all her letters to me. Her personality informs each one. First and foremost I am aware of her love for the members of her family, whose doings she invariably chronicled: the importance to her of her daughter Mary and her brother Will was evident from the start. But along with the family she was always ready to make new friends, even rejoicing in visits from admirers of her brothers' writings. Indeed these later friends seemed to be drawn by her into another, wider family circle. She lived secluded, but not withdrawn.

This interest in people and their doings was matched by a quite remarkable memory, remarkable less as an innate faculty than as evidence of a selfless, affectionate concern. Again and again in letters and conversation she would refer to people and events in your past life which you had yourself almost forgotten. Another friend of hers tells me that she even knew the names and ages of his grandchildren, although she had never met them. Her life was lived outward from deeply planted roots of imaginative sympathy. She would delight especially in accounts of places one had visited, and of walks and travels, feeling that she could share in them through what was in her case an unusually vivid and retentive mind's eye. In one of her very last letters she wrote that she was "idle, day after day—though active in my dreams walking, cycling, train journeys also! an adventure may be every night."

Alongside Lucy's interest in people and places was her love for birds and flowers. She seldom travelled; but this rootedness only enhanced her appreciation of the movements of the seasons, of the play of wind and weather, and of the coming of the flowers. Regularly in her letters she records the first

arrival of the snowdrops; and one particularly graphic memory I have is of her scrambling up a grassy bank to pluck some wayside blossom, eager as a young girl. She was never happier than when in her garden: how many of us will cherish memories of taking tea with her on that patch of tree-sprinkled grass beside her cottage! Right up to extreme old age she delighted to sit out of doors, even in cold weather; though this was a delight which some of her visitors, who did *not* have hot water bottles on their knees, were able only partially to share.

In her essay "A Famous Family" Alyse Gregory writes tenderly of Lucy, reporting that John Cowper once remarked of his "youngest sister and oldest god-daughter" that she was the most purely intellectual member of the family. This may well have been the case. She was an avid but discriminating reader of fiction, travel books, philosophy, theology and poetry; moreover she was disinterested enough to enjoy having them read *to* her. As late as 1985 she told me that she was reading Von Hugel in the morning and Chateaubriand in the afternoon; and once when I called unexpectedly I found by her chair a copy of Lucretius in the Latin. The last book she was reading before her final illness was the copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy* given by John Cowper to her mother. But her favourite reading, I suspect, was biography; and she was always glad to take up again the cherished books of her youth. The tie with Montacute was never broken. Anything to do with her brothers' writing was naturally of interest to her; and in her final years she enjoyed reading John Cowper's diaries. And her daughter's poems and journal were a great solace to her after Mary's death—a death which Lucy bore with quiet fortitude. "I tell myself that she is spared the trouble of old age and loneliness." It is good to know that if Lucy was not to be spared the first, she never knew the second.

I stress the intellectual side of her because, although gentle and warm, she had nothing of the conventionally 'sweet' old lady about her. Beneath the benevolence one felt a wise

astriugency. There was no malice in her, but there was a keen sense of mischief: she was quick to detect pomposity and revelled in absurdity wherever it erupted, having a touch of that gift for mockery which was still more evident in her sister Marian. I would have hated to incur her disapproval, for it was reserved generally for the cruel, the destructive or the thrusting. Intensely sensitive to pain and the suffering of others, she resisted anything that would make life worse than it already was for people. For her outlook was always positive, based on all that was lovely and of good report. This was not a restrictive attitude; rather, she was impatient of all that got in the way of what she believed—one might almost say ‘knew’—to be already there, apprehensible, for one’s help and joy and benefit. “I have often felt that Light—sunlight—is a form of blessing,” she once wrote to me. At her funeral service the lesson was the parable of the mustard seed in St Mark’s Gospel, Chapter 5, verses 26-32. It had been chosen by her as a last message to her friends.

She may have travelled far in spirit, but generally she valued life at home and the rhythmic passing of the days. When she did go away she keenly relished the adventure. Two trips which she wrote of with particular enthusiasm were taken to Paris, and to Derbyshire and Durham, with Phyllis Playter, always a favourite companion of hers. And her constant wakefulness to all that life had to offer was caught in an exclamation constantly upon her lips: “Isn’t that good!” In her infectious enthusiasm for what her friends would share with her she strongly resembled her eldest brother. Both were given to clasping and clapping their hands in pleasure. Certainly she regarded John Cowper as a heroic figure: her references to him were always full of admiration. “I remember when I first married at twenty the effect his writing had on my whole outlook; it sets one free!” Another reference takes one straight back to her childhood days, remembering how “we used to *follow* him in the garden at Montacute and through the woods—Always he was the one to invent

exciting games—sometimes almost terrifying to the youngest!” But that recollection is followed by the desolating realism of her account of the committal of John Cowper’s ashes to the sea at Chesil Beach. “The waves soon took the grey line and carried it away.”

A similar disciplined austerity governed her reactions to her own increasing ailments. Never once do I remember her complaining of them: her references to them were terse and factual. At the time of her daughter’s death, she recorded simply, “More blind and lame than ever.” But that was all. Happily the blindness was to be relieved through an operation which enabled her once more to employ the tiny and delicately precise handwriting which made her letters such a visual delight to read. Later she was to remark that “I cannot walk at all now,” going on immediately to tell how, “We have an escaped (from whom?) green parrot around. How cold it must be!” There was more pity for the parrot than there was for herself.

Her letters were too personally directed to their recipients to be occasions for self-expression or display. But they have a style all their own, partly on account of little verbal mannerisms and stylistic peculiarities, partly as a result of a correctness and care over verbal expression. One sees this, for example, in two alterations made in a letter concerning Phyllis Playter’s uncertainty, following John Cowper’s death, as to where to live. “I think Phyllis . . . does not feel equal to moving and dealing with an extra house . . .” The “and” is corrected to an “or”. Then in “I can understand wanting to stay among Jack’s books” she changes “wanting” to “her wish”. These may seem to be trivial points, but I cite them as instances of her scrupulosity and feeling for linguistic accuracy, qualities which she probably derived from her mother’s teaching at Montacute, to which she often referred with gratitude. Her love for her mother was, I would guess, one of the most enduring influences in her life.

That she was able to live out her life at home was a source of constant gratitude to

her; she delighted to talk of the understanding and companionship she shared with Gerard Casey whose care for her in her final years was the instrument of a happiness in which her friends could share. In her life and friendships Lucy was to conserve much of what this family had meant to one another. What the others wrote about, she lived—the devoted attachment to their childhood days, their curiosity and delight in oddities of behaviour, their response to natural beauty and to nature's mysteries, their precise knowledge of animal life, of birds and trees and flowers. Not for nothing did she choose to live at Mappowder: there she could commune with Theodore, share his responses, accompany his walks. He and she were probably the most naturally religious of the brothers and sisters. In both of them one recognizes a sounding-out of a spiritual universe inseparable from the material world in which they lived, each one an aspect of the other.

Towards the end of her life Lucy seemed to move ever deeper into that dimension; and I have been told that as she lay dying, she suddenly looked up and said, "When I close my eyes I see flowers everywhere." Those words express her nature perfectly, and bring back to mind the sight of her sitting in her garden, reading or talking with her friends, but always attentive to the visits of the birds and the sounds and movements in the flowers and trees. That final vision of flowers was the result of what she was, for as two of her sisters independently bore witness, her chief characteristic was a loving heart. It was suggested to me that I should set below her name some words of Shakespeare which seemed to fit her perfectly; and this I have done. For myself, I shall miss her more than I can say.

Gordon Wynne

The Sermon delivered at the funeral service of Lucy Amelia Penny in the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Mappowder, 10 November 1986.

We have just listened to two small parables: the parable of the growing seed and then the parable of the mustard seed.* Both of these bear the stamp of that remarkable man St Mark, the earliest of the gospel writers. They have all Mark's simplicity, his devastating brevity, his high contrasts, his colourful word-pictures, his strong hard language that would strike sparks off granite.

Consider also the subject matter. First there is the story of the seed growing secretly. The sower goes about his other business and the seed grows, he knows not how. The earth, says Mark in very strong words, bears fruit *of itself*, or by itself, not by the sower's skill. Then, when the moment comes, there is harvest. Secondly there is the mustard seed. We are told, again with great emphasis and without a word wasted, that the mustard seed is very small. But, when grown, the bush is very big with branches bigger than other herbs, big enough for the birds to sit in.

Lucy herself has asked us to think about these parables this morning. How apt, how wonderfully and indeed poignantly apt, that she should have done so, and how characteristic of her. For both parables are about little things, very little things, and both are country stories.

Now in my family four generations have had the joy of knowing and loving Lucy. We know well, as most of us this afternoon will know, that Lucy shares with her mother and father, her brothers and sisters and with her daughter Mary, an intense, inward delight in nature and in small things: a delight and joy beyond words but an inspiration that is unique and unrepeatable. Once, as a boy, I found a nasturtium with yellow flowers

*Mark 4 vv. 26-32: the text chosen by Lucy Penny for her funeral service, as her last message to her friends.

Margaret Woolf

Remembering Lucy

Although on both my first and my last visits to Lucy Penny we remained indoors, for me she is always in her garden. It is there I see her, in the shade of a particular tree, ensuring that teacups are full and that everyone has enough bread and butter, with jam or honey to his taste. It is from there I hear her—discussing books, admiring family photographs, asking about our children and reminiscing about her own family. One of Lucy's most striking qualities, and she had many, was her abiding and genuine interest in people. In this she brought to mind all I had read of her brother, John. She had that gift for drawing people out, for making them feel that they, and all that they had to say, were of the greatest interest to her.

I first met Lucy Penny in the spring of 1976, and still remember the mixed feelings with which my husband and I set out for Mappowder on the appointed day. Even the sight of the jaunty green ribbon that Mrs Penny had told us to look for on her cottage gate did little to allay our anxiety. We were, we felt, intruding on her privacy. Did our admiration for the Powys brothers' works really give us the right to bother their sister? Nevertheless, there we were. Before we could knock, the door opened on an irresistible smile, and a welcoming voice bade us "Come in, come in."

How quickly Lucy put us at ease, showing us paintings by her sister Gertrude and her brother Will, talking about her family, asking about ours, and about our life in Canada. As I came to realise in the years that followed, Lucy's zest for life embraced the new as well as the old. She loved to hear of other countries and other ways of life; and yet I have never met anyone whose happiness with her own life, even when it became extremely circumscribed by physical frailty, was so palpable a thing. Similarly, one was as likely to find Lucy reading a book so new that it had not yet reached Canada, as to find her re-reading Matthew Arnold or Thomas Hardy.



Lucy, c. 1925-26, taken in New York.

It was during that first visit that we met Lucy's daughter, Mary Casey, and Mary's husband, Gerard. I was immensely struck, seeing mother and daughter together, by how strongly both, in their different ways, resembled John in appearance. The talk flowed easily, and touched on many things—books, jobs, good walks to take in and around Sturminster, our pleasure at hearing a cuckoo that morning as we walked through the fields by the river Stour. Then there was tea, with unforgettable bread baked by Lucy. By this time Gerard had joined us. We talked of Hardy and Wessex, and of "Tess" and her walks in particular.

Gerard, learning of my love for the *Iliad*, took me to his and Mary's adjoining cottage, where I held John Cowper Powys's own Homer, and his huge *Greek Lexicon*. That was an unforgettable moment. Altogether, it was for us a memorable afternoon, and it was as well that we agreed beforehand that we must leave at a certain hour if we were not to outstay our welcome, or overtire our hostess, for it was hard to believe that Lucy Penny was then eightyfive.

I corresponded with both Lucy and Mary during the year that followed, and in June 1977 we again visited Mappowder. Nothing had changed except the weather, which allowed us to have tea in the garden as we did on almost all subsequent visits.

On our next visit, in 1980, everything had changed. Mary had died suddenly, and Lucy was in hospital with a broken hip. Gerard, though obviously grief-stricken, was kind enough to drive us to Yeovil to visit Lucy. As we might have known, she was the darling of nurses and other patients alike. It is not possible for me to find anything positive in Mary's untimely death, but perhaps some good came of Lucy's broken hip, in that she discovered that hospitals were not as dreadful as she had supposed, and eventually agreed to return for eye surgery. The benefits of this were apparent in her letters to me: where formerly she had been restricted to writing a page at most, she now wrote several pages in a clear and legible hand. Lucy's letters were always a joy to me, and I shall miss them greatly. Also, she was again

to read her beloved books, and on later visits that is how we always found her—surrounded by books.

Unfortunately the broken hip eventually kept Lucy confined to a chair or to bed. From this chair she kept up her vast correspondence, answering letters with a promptness that would put most of us to shame, and with a memory that never failed. She always remembered exactly what my sons were doing, for example, and never forgot to ask about them in her letters. She knew how much I missed the first flowers of an English spring, and would write to tell me that Gerard had wheeled her out to see the first snowdrops.

Our last visit to Lucy was on her ninety-fifth birthday—the house full of flowers and Lucy reading Alice James's *Letters*. She looked very frail, but happy to see us, and was so interested in some photographs we had brought, of our older son's wedding, that she kept returning to them, admiring the frocks and asking who this or that person was.

The news of Lucy's death was not a shock, but it was a grievous blow. I had lost not only a friend, but someone who embodied for me all the virtues and graces I most admired—charm, courtesy, kindness, intellectual power and, perhaps most important, an ability to accept, rather than resign herself to, adversity. All the Powys children were talented, but Lucy had the greatest talent of all—a talent for living.

Alyse Gregory

Philippa Powys*

Catharine Edith Philippa Powys, as she was christened—Philippa as she was usually called, Katie to her family—was born in 1886, the ninth of eleven children, to the Rev. Charles Francis Powys, Vicar of Montacute, Somerset, and his wife, née Mary Cowper Johnson. The members of this large family fell naturally into alliances, and Lucy, nearest in age among the girls to Philippa, was, up to the time of her marriage, her particular companion. The loss of this sister as her cherished confidant was an irreparable blow to Philippa—“She crossed the bridge and now we can only talk across it!” Yet it would be difficult to find two sisters who so little resembled one another. Lucy was gentle, full of shy and extremely reserved grace and ravishingly lovely to look at while Philippa, a handsome, awkward girl, was large boned, impetuous, strong willed with turbulent emotions and an adventurous mind thirsting for knowledge.

It was after Lucy's marriage that Philippa's emotional life came gradually to centre on a group of fisher folk in Sidmouth. It was the custom during the tourist season for the fishermen to gather in an extra penny or so by taking visitors out in their boats, and Lucy and she had on their visits to this famous watering resort enjoyed several such expeditions and made friends with two of the fishermen—Bob and Tom Wooley. Living with the Wooleys was a young man called Stephen Reynolds, five years Philippa's senior. She had noticed him helping

the men with their boats accompanied by his Great Dane and was attracted by his good looks and air of reserve, obviously not of the working class.

When Philippa met Stephen Reynolds she was herself somewhat of a rebel while he was a socialist with an acute and informed mind and a poetical one as well, an ardent admirer of Walt Whitman, a strong bond between them. He was the first person she had known who would discuss politics and literature with her as if her opinion mattered. Combined with this sudden initiation into an exciting world of ideas was the romance of the sea folk, a veritable intoxication for one of her inflammable temperament and at so impressionable an age. A few desultory letters passed between them and so unruly did her infatuation become for this apparently self-contained young man that she was temporarily unbalanced and her parents were obliged to send her to a sanatorium in Bristol. She has described her sensations at this time in a long prose poem, *The Phoenix*. In referring to this experience to me she once said: “I remember saying to myself, they think I am mad, I *will* be mad.”

After returning from Bristol she spent some time at Montacute, then entered an agricultural college at Studley in Warwickshire. Her mother died in 1914 and she came back to live at the Vicarage in Montacute where, after her father had, with his eldest daughter, removed to Weymouth, she rented a small farm house with the farm

*The typescript of this article, entitled “Notes on C.E.E.P.” was sent to me by Peter Powys Grey, son of Marian Powys and nephew of Philippa Powys. It is published with the permission of Alyse Gregory's literary executor, Rosemary Manning.

A few views and images of Philippa (Katie) found in this article are condensed into a paragraph of Alyse Gregory's “A Famous Family”, *London Magazine*, 1958, which I included in its entirety in my *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*, 1980; see p. 57. Obviously the recollections published here were composed between January 1963, the time of Philippa's death, and 1967, the year of Alyse Gregory's death. *B.H.*

attached, and with a few cows carried on a dairy business making butter and selling milk. It was here that she had a bad fall from her pony and had to have her teeth extracted, a shattering experience for her.

Stephen Reynolds died in 1919 and from that time up to her death Philippa never lost touch with the Wooleys. She went frequently to stay with them and later rented a cottage just off the front where she dispensed cups of tea to the fishermen coming in from their all night catches. Her greatest delight was to be included in their early morning fishing expeditions and to be accepted as one of them into their lives. Stephen Reynolds remained the true romance of her life. A small framed photograph of him accompanied her wherever she went.

When her brother Llewelyn married, Philippa crossed the ocean to visit him and his wife* at Patchin Place, N.Y. (1923), one of the great liberating experiences of her life. She always asserted that Americans were the first to make her feel a person in her own right and she retained a love for this country of Walt Whitman to the end of her days.

Her brother Theodore was living in East Chaldon, a remote Dorset village, and on her return from America she and her eldest sister Gertrude took a farm house about two miles distant from him across fields and meadows. It was far up on the downs, a field length only from the high chalk cliffs that look out across the English channel. Here she could walk for hours along the deserted downland tracks sure of meeting no one. One of her happiest pastimes was to gather driftwood deposited on the rough shingle shore by the incoming tides and fastening it with stout sailor's rope across her back scramble up the precipitous cliff path to bring home for her fire.

At the bottom of a valley a mile or so from Chydyok, where hers and her sister's house

was situated, her Kenya brother, Will, had rented from the local farmer an abandoned labourer's cottage much in need of repair. He had had it patched up to withstand the weather and used it as a kind of holiday camp for the family on their infrequent visits to England. The local name given it was Rat's Barn because when taken over by him it was infested with rats. It was totally isolated, to be reached only by climbing up and down steep gorze-strewn slopes and traversing wide flinty fields enclosed by wire. It was in this cottage that Philippa loved to spend her nights. She would start out late in the evening a knapsack over her back, sometimes under bright starlight but more often in fog or rain, and with no light to guide her, she would by a kind of instinct discover her way to the door of the melancholy, ghost-haunted habitation. Here she would build a fire of gorze sticks in the huge smoky fire place, light a lamp, and spend hours of contentment in the little sitting room under its sloping eaves. She loved especially waking at dawn in the total stillness of the morning. She would, after her breakfast, walk up to look at the sea and return to Chydyok along the cliff path that led to her beloved 'Tumbledown', a name given locally to the field adjoining Chydyok. So much did she come to associate this field with her free life and so familiar was she with its every contour, almost with its every flint and tuft of grass, that when the farmer who rented it decided to plough it for sowing she was inconsolable. In the memory of the oldest inhabitant thereabouts such a thing had never happened before.

Apart from her life-long devotion to the memory of Stephen Reynolds, her strongest emotional attachments were for her brother Llewelyn and her friend Valentine Ackland. She was universally popular with the natives of E. Chaldon (the village nearest Chydyok) and one among them was particularly dear to her. Alice Hewlett, the mother of six little children, married to a headstrong man with black blood, combined a gentle goodness with a warm and capacious heart. She was always happy to welcome her into her

*This is Alyse Gregory herself. She married Llewelyn Powys in 1924, came to Britain with him in 1925, to live first at the White Nose, not far from East Chaldon, then in Chydyok, referred to below, from 1931.

homely cottage kitchen where Philippa's natural demonstrativeness could find free and sympathetic expansion. It was next to her that according to her wishes Philippa was buried in the East Chaldon churchyard.

With Llewelyn she could tremble with apprehension if she feared she had displeased him, the mere movement of an eyelash could affect her, and she was so delicately balanced, combining so vigorous an egoism with so burning a capacity for love and so great a need for reassurance that it was not always easy, even with the greatest tact, to avoid causing her unhappiness.

To portray the contrary aspects of her character would tax the powers of the most accomplished analyst—the rapturous illuminated imagination, the absorbed egocentric preoccupations, the peasant cunning, and the impassioned thirst for knowledge which beat itself against the evasive complexities of abstract philosophical problems in a desperate attempt to salvage some shred of insight and remembrance. As a child she developed a sense of inferiority with her brothers owing to the instability of her nerves and the difficulty she had to concentrate. The girls never had any education other than that imparted by a governess following the custom of those days.

The church became anathema to her, she associated it with hours of enforced boredom and a total indifference to the desperate preoccupations of her heart, and it failed her in her hour of need. The mere sound of the organ or church bells reaching her from a distance could cause her to feel trapped.

Innumerable pictures of her return to me, I can see her in the early morning striding exultantly up to have a look at the sea before breakfast, quite oblivious of the startled sheep scattering in all directions at her advance, and at the breakfast table bent low over a huge plate of oats thick coated with Demarara sugar and swimming in thick cream, as formidable as her father was said to be if disturbed when composing his sermons. How great a contrast to her sister Gertrude at the other end of the table, an expression conspiring, gay, ironical yet

protective under an exquisitely dainty lace cap, her cheeks faintly flushed like the petals of a wild rose. She belonged to those members of the family, like John and Llewelyn, who with the rising of the sun were wide awake, primed for argument. With what prolonged gusto Philippa could lick the honey spoon and with what satisfaction seat herself before the roast, crisp and sizzling from the oven. She was one with Dr Johnson and Lord Alfred Tennyson who paid respectful homage to the palate, though she was by no means a glutton.

Gertrude, who if alone could have contented herself with a diet of cheese, lettuce, and fruit to gain time for her painting, used to do the cooking and Philippa the washing up. The back pantry, where the dirty dishes were assembled, was a small cheerless space with a stone floor, the only light coming from a window that opened on to a dim passage leading to an outside door. Philippa's imagination was ever her greatest liberator and reconciler. She said she got through this obnoxious task through deliberat[ely] concentrating on the Resurrection.

Her life was largely a series of battles. Her battle with the paraphernalia of daily living was an ever present one. Objects, she used to say, harboured imps whose sole end was to torment her. Spoons and forks had cunning hiding places, sauce pans spilled over of their own volition. Yet with the perpetual frustration which anything to do with material objects presented to her she combined an almost rigid sense of ritual and even when ill with a high temperature would send her agitated sister-in-law down the steep uncarpeted stairs to change one knife or plate or salt cellar or egg cup or milk jug for another almost exactly similar. Both sisters had this ritualistic turn of mind, it runs in the family, so little based on convenience or explicable to reason, and the remarkable woman who for seventeen years came to work for them found with myself a considerable intellectual exercise in conquering the ins and outs of their imperious and perplexing predilections.

The real and ever present warfare of Phil-

ippa's life was, however, with words. With so charged an imagination and so excitable a mind, one that could not wait on reflexion and remained unaided by memory, she would fling in any word that might serve at the moment regardless of its appropriateness or even of its existence and we used to collect what we called "Katieisms" just as the pupils of Spooner used to collect Spoonerisms. Her voice raised to the pitch and vehemence of a sea captain's as the rollers swept in over the deck and the life boats were launched, it could at such times be nothing short of calamitous to venture an interruption.

When it was a matter of her writing, even if only a letter, she applied herself with a moving diligence, studying her dictionary as if deciphering some ancient script. She had an original approach to, and a sure taste in literature and was a great reader. She could at once separate the contrived from the authentic and was, though trained only in the classics, susceptible to modern trends and subtle plays of relationships. I remember bringing her with some misgiving a book of Faulkner's fearing lest it might be too remote from her own world for her appreciation but she read it with enthusiasm. She went through my whole edition of Henry James rereading her special favourite novels or short stories whenever she found herself without a book. French authors were a particular delight to her and she usually had one of her beloved Russian authors at hand. Her two favourite poets were Walt Whitman and Matthew Arnold.

She was at all times striking, and for the discriminating, distinguished in appearance. With her small Patrician head, her beautiful hair, dark when I first met her, white and cut close to her scalp in later life, her tall stooping figure, and her somewhat eccentric manner of dress she invariably attracted attention and could even arouse stares from the vulgar.

My own relationship with her combined that of conspirator, companion-at-arms, Wailing Wall, and trusted friend. After Gertrude's death, with no chatelaine to take

command, we were left, with failing powers, wholly to our own devices, and when the hurricane winds beat down upon us, whirling slates from the roof tops, or floods or snow cut us away from the village, we lived in the manner of light house keepers in the grim battlement of our entrenched isolation. In fine weather nothing could have been more delicious than our situation, with the sea only a few steps from our door and the down emerald green reaching in undulating curves to the far horizon. We lived in separate houses joined by a long enclosed stone passage leading from my back door to hers. Thus, though our interests engaged us so differently—she spent the greater part of her day working in her garden—we were able to reach one another at a moment's notice. We had daily to fetch our letters and provisions from the village and it was Philippa who, up to the time she was incapacitated by an injury to her back, pitted herself against the worst storms arriving home bent under the weight of a huge knapsack, water streaming from her, and lids to our milk cans left far behind carried off by the gales.

Some years before her death we both moved to more convenient quarters, she in Dorset and I in Devon, and could meet rarely, but the bond between us remained enduring and intimate to the end.

Philippa published only one novel—*Blackthorn Winter*—and four collections of verses. An excerpt from *The Phoenix* was published in *The Dial* magazine and a number of her poems appeared in periodicals. As highly endowed as any of her famous brothers she lacked the initial instruction, sustained application, and literary craftsmanship to compete in the contemporary world of fiction. She left behind three unpublished novels and two plays, all highly romantic, containing passages of dramatic power and descriptions of the countryside worthy of Hardy; but the plots are too circumscribed, the dialogue too stilted, the morality too old-fashioned to inveigle the modern reader. She wrote out of her time.

When it comes to her poetry it would be

difficult to find a parallel with which to compare it. In spite of innocence of rhyme and lack of knowledge of poetic rules, at its best it rises into the ranks of greatness. It is original, inspired, surprising in its delicacy, impressive in its depth and nobility of feeling.

Were it not for the high fervour she devoted to everything she undertook, the bone-deep reciprocity she felt for nature, the long periods of pleasure had in her garden, on her pony, with her fisher folk at Sidmouth, reading and writing in her silent lamp-lit room filled with mementos collected since childhood, one might say that her

life had been a tragic one. Slaves to loves she could neither subdue nor conceal, unable to accept or assimilate the most bitter instructions of life, with periods of withering lucidity and self-castigation she suffered every reverse with a combination of entrenched defiance and crushing lonely grief.

In her journals—kept with few lapses over a period of fifty years—and in her letters she has left a strong imprint of her personality as well as an absorbing record of family relationships and activities, a rich harvest for the student. Certain verses of hers are surely destined for posterity.

Frank Warren

Winter at Chydyok: A Reverie

One can see things at Chydyok
 (The cottage on the downs where we have stayed)
 On a winter's night, dark, dark,
 The wind moans in the chimney
 The trees stir in the glade below . . .

Locals say they see things, silent, spooky even,
 Over Chalky Knap, misty white shapes form,
 The sheep nibble grass, an owl flies over,
 The wind moans in the chimney
 Trees stir and sway in the glade below . . .

Reviews

The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys,
H. W. FAWKNER.

Associated University Presses, 1986, £22.95.

The excessive praise which Fawkner lavishes on Hegel in his introduction led me to fear that the wrong reviewer had been chosen for this book. For I enjoy most those philosophers such as Schopenhauer who detested Hegel; and one of the minor pleasures of reading Powys himself is the gusto with which he, or his characters, lay into this insufferable philosopher. (Fawkner knows [p. 19] that Powys looks with no friendly eye upon Hegel.) Take this for example from *Rodmoor* (described by Fawkner as "this rather immature romance" [p. 101]). Adrian Sorio is speaking:

And see how the rabble are afraid of Spinoza!
See how they turn to the contemptible Hegel,
the grocer of philosophy, with his precious
"self-assertion" and "self-realization!"
(Macdonald ed., 1973, pp. 325-6)

Even for the sake of Powys himself I am not prepared to believe that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is "probably the greatest intellectual achievement of Western man" (p. 19). If it were, and if an understanding of Powys in some way depended upon this fact, I should not care to read another line of Powys again. Fortunately, however, this kind of nonsense is soon forgotten and Fawkner has to offer an interesting, and indeed original, book on John Cowper Powys.

Happily, it turns out to be much more important in Fawkner's critical assessment of Powys to understand recent scientific research on the brain, in particular work done on the distinction between sinistral and dextral brain-functioning and thinking, than it does to understand anything that Hegel ever wrote.

R. G. Collingwood somewhere well speaks of "the monstrous concatenations of the Hegelian dialectic"; and certainly the word "dialectical" is nowadays overworked; it seems to make a mandatory appearance in all contemporary works of literary theory and criticism. Mercifully its appearance in Fawkner's introduction proves to be only a minor irritation and not an augury of what is to follow. Indeed in the body of the book, dialectical analysis, where it is

undertaken, is deployed to good effect in the movement Fawkner convincingly demonstrates is to be found in the Powys novel to and from ego (bad) to self (good).

Even if the brain physiology in terms of which Fawkner reads Powys's novels turned out to be wrong or inadequate (a possibility this book does not entertain), it nevertheless enables Powys's great works to be read in an interesting, and indeed an illuminating, way; rather as the categories of psychoanalysis in the hands of a sensitive art critic such as Adrian Stokes illuminate the art he discusses, even for those readers not persuaded that Freud or Melanie Klein are gospel truth.

Freud indeed is far from gospel truth for Fawkner, who much prefers cognitive or neuroscience; and as he reminds us, Powys's own attitude towards psychoanalysis was "intensely hostile" (p. 60). I don't agree with Fawkner, however, that the neurophysiological model of mind—or brain—which is the foundation of the argument of this book, is the only one which "will permit us to understand" the reasons for Powys's hostility to psychoanalysis. Powys after all gave us his own reason when he postulated a conflict between the outlooks of Freud and Dostoevsky, and enlisted himself under the banner of Dostoevsky, a name which incidentally never appears in this book.

Fawkner's failure to mention Dostoevsky might seem to constitute grounds for criticism but such would be misplaced. For if Fawkner, a literary critic whose publications include a study of Dickens, does not discuss Powys's literary sources, this is the result of a deliberate choice. For the thesis he has to argue requires the application of ideas to Powys's novels drawn not from literature and cultural history but from brain science. So he is not interested here in tracing relationships between Powys and other writers, nor in questions of influence nor for that matter in any perspective done, speaking more generally, from the history of ideas; and his chapters have decidedly non-diachronic titles such as "Crystal and Aura", together with subtitles such as: "The Zones of Ecstasy", "Kernel and Aureole", "The Eye and the Stream".

Given Powys's own well-known hostility to science, the central importance Fawkner attaches to cognitive science as the means for under-

standing Powys's novels has a piquancy which is not lost on the author. At the same time, he makes Powys seem much less hostile to science than he was, almost as if John Cowper believed in brain physiology with the same fervour as Fawcner does, or would have done so had he lived to become acquainted with its findings. Thus Fawcner tends to represent the science he doesn't like, Freudianism, behaviourism, and so on, as "a spurious set of pseudo-scientific categories" while implying that the things which interested Powys, such as what "soul" traditionally and pre-scientifically denoted, are readily comprehended within the realms of dextral awareness (pp. 185-6). Neurophysiology it seems can accommodate the soul; behaviourism and Freudianism cannot. This may or may not be so, but Powys is not by these arguments himself to be recruited into the ranks of the admirers of cognitive science. For Powys's hostility, I conjecture, would extend to this too, were he to have been confronted with its categories. Nor is it the case that what Fawcner labels pseudo-science is therefore pseudo-science without argument. The questions of the status of Freudianism (why Freudianism and not psycho-analysis?) and of behaviourism as sciences have been much debated in the philosophy of science in recent years and the judgment that they are pseudo-sciences without the supporting arguments is too glib. (Incidentally two very different animals are being condemned here as pseudo-science; for though one may dislike both Freudianism and behaviourism as Powys did, when it comes to the question of their respective status as sciences there is the world of difference between them.)

Fawcner is very persuasive in the account he gives of what the word "ecstasy" means for Powys and in his characterization of the quality of ecstasy to be found in Powys's writing. Re-reading Powys after reading Fawcner on this subject will be to enjoy a deeper experience, now informed by the urgencies and resonances in Powys's ecstasy to which Fawcner so rightly and convincingly points. Thanks to Fawcner we come to see and to acknowledge just how important ecstasy is for Powys and what it really means. Fawcner has convinced me that if we don't see this we shall misread Powys:

Consider *A Glastonbury Romance*, John Cowper's best novel. The whole venture begins with an ecstasy; that is, it begins with a passage that can only be read as ecstasy, that

can only be understood as ecstasy. If this passage is read as anything but ecstasy, it will be misread. And such a misreading (implying the superimposition of a nonecstatic grid on an ecstatic text) totally misses the movement and momentum that are so essential a feature of ecstasy and the ecstatic novel. If the reader is caught off guard, or deliberately refuses to cooperate with the ecstasy, assimilating it as nonecstasy, then everything is dead from the start, and the book can move nowhere. It merely becomes a whimsical, nonsensical jumble of disparate and overwritten trivialities, sprinkled with the occult and quasi-philosophical. The same is true for the beginning of Dickens's *Bleak House*. (pp. 150-1)

This has helped me to understand the nature of my experience when I first read *A Glastonbury Romance*: namely, I could not determine then if it wasn't the worst novel I had ever read on account of its apparent tastelessness, yet at the same time I was perplexed by the inkling that it might be the most tremendous work I had ever encountered. This ambivalent response, I conclude, was grounded on an awareness of, but not a full surrender to, Powys's ecstatic mode of writing, which Fawcner writes about so well.

Fawcner is also very good on the subject of the inanimate in Powys:

When the writer describes his thought processes as the thought processes of the inanimate, we must not underestimate him, believing that he is on the level of some innocent savage, attributing to objects individual personality and consciousness. Rather he is trying to convey the difference between the common state of consciousness, in which we remain conceptually aloof and removed from the *being* of exterior reality, and the altered state of consciousness, in which this being is more fully taken in, *as being*. (pp. 50-1)

Besides my hostility towards Hegel's philosophy (an attitude common in Britain in the first half of this century but now ineluctably passé), I have to admit to an indiscriminating pleasure in everything that Powys wrote, regardless of its genre or form. This I well know is not a properly literary critical (or professionally responsible) attitude to take to Powys, although to enjoy and to take pleasure in his writing wherever we can find it is to display that desperately unfashionable cast of mind so well expressed in his books, such as *The Pleasures of Literature* and *Visions*

and Revisions, and which is so offensive to the anti-humanist stance of our contemporary critical theory. This reluctance on my part to distinguish between the various kinds of Powys book, partly because I am captured by the philosophical voice (a curious blend of meditation and humour) which I hear in all his work, unfits me to look kindly upon Fawkner's approach, which is to draw a sharp distinction between Powys's fiction and non-fiction and then to go on to maintain that we should trust the (best of his) fiction but not the non-fiction, at least where this seems to make statements which seem to reflect back on the fiction. These statements, Fawkner says, are untrustworthy:

The model of consciousness I have described is the only one that will permit us to understand . . . the extreme caution that the scholar must apply to any mode of critical investigation aligning the extrafictional John Cowper Powys with the intrafictional John Cowper Powys. As I shall presently show, the man in the novels, and the psychology of the man in the novels, only exists *in* the novels. The thinking that goes on in the novel (or which *is* the novel) is not the same thing as the thinking of the novelist that goes on outside the novel—for instance in a philosophical work of his. (pp. 60-1)

This should be music to the ears of those who believe in the autonomy of art but not to those inartistic souls among whom John Cowper *said* he belonged (though I very much doubt if he did), who find a Powysian message or philosophical progaganda in all his works. It must be said that Fawkner develops a most interesting argument which, alas, has made me more reluctant than hitherto, whether I wish to or not, to take at face value Powys's statements in his philosophy books. Though a philosopher can allow himself to be unscrupulous about literary kinds, Fawkner, as a responsible literary critic, is of course right that it is necessary to make some distinctions in kind and quality between works in the Powys oeuvre. Fawkner's contribution is to draw some of these distinctions in a pertinent and original manner.

One of his most interesting distinctions is between the self and the ego. Applied to the novels, this yields some illuminating results. The movement from ego to self is explored by Fawkner with a humanity worthy of its subject. Although his avowed admirations seem to be for Hegel and for brain science (an unlikely couple), his

account of the distinction between ego and self has some affinity with the teachings and meditation practices of Buddhism, which itself suggests to me that he may be on the right track, given the grounds there are independent of Fawkner's book for looking at Powys in a Buddhist perspective. But this is not Fawkner's view. First he thinks it more important (which I do not), to view Powys in the context of the problem in *Western* metaphysics of reconciling the One and the many, especially in the solution proposed by "Hegel, Nietzsche, and Derrida (possibly also Heidegger)" namely "*The cosmos does not produce difference; difference produces the cosmos*" (p. 18, italics in original). (I am afraid that I find this to be dreary twaddle.) Secondly:

Powys now moves on to contrast his premeditated ecstasy with the oriental manipulation of the altered state of consciousness—or, rather, the oriental failure to manipulate the altered state of consciousness. The eastern indifference to pleasure and pain comes precisely out of this passive encounter with ecstasy. Ecstasy rules man rather than vice versa . . . Christ is now linked with the ascendant ecstasy, Buddha with the descendent ecstasy. (p. 205)

Fawkner goes on to quote John Cowper on "the ideas of Buddha, with that monstrous life-blasphemy of being indifferent to both pain and pleasure" and for reasons I can't see hyphenates the Tao with Christianity and against Buddhism ("There is, we have just seen, a vital difference between the Buddhistic implosion and the Christian-Taoist explosion" [pp. 205-6]).

I have no doubt that the distinction between self and ego is an important one; I am less sure that it has to be reached by the route of Western brain science, though this is an ungracious point to make given the illumination of Powys Fawkner does achieve by use of these categories, which *a priori* would not have been expected. There is, however, one more use he could have made of the application of the distinction between sinistral and dextral thinking to Powys, namely the idea recently proposed that the sense of humour is located in the right half of the cerebral hemisphere. This is an interesting idea when we recall the central importance of humour in Powys's works.

Given the doubt Fawkner has cast on the non-fictional work, he may be right that we shouldn't turn to *Confessions of Two Brothers*, a work

which seems to cause him some embarrassment, to illuminate the fiction. There is a case, however, to be made for the other side, namely that in *Confessions* there is a running critique of action and of the will which finds triumphant fictional embodiment in *Wolf Solent*.

"Generally speaking," Fawkner says, "*Confessions* is the most misleading of all Powys's works" (p. 69). I don't deny that it is a tricky work but so is a good deal else that Powys wrote and a book can only mislead if there is a truth from which it is leading the unwary away. But if the truth here is the conception Fawkner has erected of what sort of writer Powys is, then the other possibility is not that Powys misleads but that Fawkner is drawing too tightly his conception of the sort of writer Powys was. This would accord with my own prejudice taken from Leibniz that philosophers are generally right in what they assert and wrong in what they deny. Generalizing this to include literary critics and the particular case of Fawkner's book, it would mean that Fawkner is right, for example, to trace in Powys's fiction the movement from ego to self but wrong to do this by putting the non-fiction under some sort of interdict. Powys's own mind did not work through this kind of exclusivity. Rather, like Whitman, he has the capaciousness to contain contradictions. "Contain", not "resolve" or "synthesize". This is why Powys's own thinking is not dialectical, not Hegelian, why he has more affinity with William James than with Hegel, and why I don't take too seriously the idea of Powys as the latest metaphysician of the One and the many.

These are, I fear, somewhat tendentious criticisms of Fawkner. First, he does admire certain of the non-fictional books, e.g. *In Defence of Sensuality*, *A Philosophy of Solitude*, and *Mortal Strife*. Secondly, and more importantly, according to Fawkner:

The first great task that criticism must set up for itself . . . is that of defining subsystems within the intellectual multiverse of the individual thinker. Once certain clusters of ideas have been clarified, there follows the task of establishing some kind of hierarchy. Which ideas are central, crucial? Which ideas are of marginal significance? If the critic believes that the writer has a single, selfsame "I" without internal rifts and displacements, he will fall into the enormous error of imagining that all the statements and ideas of the writer belong to one single, unified field of discourse. (pp. 26-6)

In my declared attachment above to Powys's philosophical voice I have in effect admitted to this "enormous error" but am not convinced that it is an error. In any case, the possibilities—define a hierarchical set of ideas or believe a writer's statements constitute a unified discourse—are not the only ones. There is for example the possibility that a writer's work is polyphonous. Back to Dostoevsky. I do not maintain that Powys does imitate Dostoevsky in this but cite the possibility merely to show that in the anti-thesis he lays down Fawkner is again drawing his lines too tightly.

There is much else in this illuminating (and for me provocative) book to discuss but this review is already too long, and more to admire such as the treatment of sexuality by Powys and the very important point (p. 216) about how, "Because like Nietzsche, he resents all forms of vulgar duality-thinking, John Cowper will always demystify the mystique in his novels and always rationalize their mystique". I have long felt that Powys hated mystery, but equally have been much embarrassed by this conviction since it seems so obviously contrary to the picture he did so much himself to foster of Powys as magician, dithyrambic performer and scourge of rationalists and pedants. Fawkner's ideas in this part of his book may well hold the key I believe to this particular mystery.

There are not many misprints but I noticed these: "quiet" (p. 43) should be "quite"; for "Sherbourne" (p. 53 and index) read "Sherborne"; "propostions" should be "propositions" (p. 69); "Maiden Castle" (p. 128) should be in italics; "solitude" is interestingly rendered "soiltude" (p. 184); in *Rodmoor* Miss Herrick is Nance, not (p. 197) Nancy—the inappropriateness of this reminds us how good Powys was at naming; likewise Rock should be Rook Ashover (p. 174) as in Fawkner's text he generally is.

T. J. DIFFEY

The Art of Autobiography in 19th and 20th Century England,

A. O. J. COCKSHUT.

Yale University Press, 1984, £10.95.

As with all forms of literature whose aim is to describe reality, the key question in the judgement of autobiography is that of truth . . . The critic of autobiography must

grapple with different kinds of truth. The simple truth of accurate record of facts is clearly important; but as a rule this is overshadowed by other kinds. At the same time we are judging the autobiographer's central idea, the shape of his life as he saw it . . . The autobiographies we call great are those where the master-idea has its own momentous dignity, but at the same time is only felt as working through the contingent and everyday.

Autobiography is an art which did not (as the author argues) take off until the early nineteenth century. Before that, largely speaking, the motive of the writer was not so much self-analysis, and the exploration of self-perception, as an incidental narrative to record the facts of a life. The interest of a reader was deemed to be less in point of view than in the objective recording of facts. Mr Cockshut has assembled some thirty-five examples from the Romantics to the present day and treated some thirty of them individually, twenty-two under separate title headings. His range of reference is tremendous; he moves with ease from the renegade Tractarian, Blanco White, to the pilgrims of our own time, C. S. Lewis and Dom Bede Griffiths; from Elizabeth Sewell, who wrote for the glory of God, to H. G. Wells, who wrote for money; from Harriette Wilson to J. R. Ackerley, both of whom defined their lives by sexual encounters. In a book of only something over two hundred pages the analysis of each is necessarily limited, and is presented more as brilliant observation than close expansion of an argument. But what the reader may feel he misses in terms of extended scrutiny, he certainly gains in lucid concentration, as the author moves, with deft and terse economy of expression, from one category of autobiography to another to answer the question the book asks: how do people perceive their own nature and development, and in what literary forms do they convey them to the reader?

This question of the self-perception of the individual is, all the same, one which the author seems sometimes able to disregard at his convenience. Having told us, for example, that the autobiographer's "central idea" is "the shape of his life as he saw it", he then offers us a life not in the shape of how the individual necessarily sees it, as how he, the commentator, chooses to present it. From the material quarried from the autobiography, the commentator presents a version made up of selected details which confirm the "central idea" of his portrait, rather

than the intention of the autobiographer. John Cowper Powys is perhaps the best example of this. One category of autobiography is listed under a section called "The Quest", and in it John Cowper Powys is defined solely in terms of his quest for sexual identity. In this context the author is concerned only with the details of what Powys called his "Viciousness", his "Conscience", his "sadism", and his "malice". The whole topic is allowed only seven pages, and it is predictable that so partial a portrait of Powys should emerge. It is regrettable that other arguably equally defining aspects of Powys demonstrated in the *Autobiography*—his emergence, for instance, as a creative writer, and his growing consciousness of his own role as an artist—go unmentioned. They are certainly the more significant in our understanding of how the novelist projects himself. Or Mr Cockshut might have found it appropriate to consider him with Ruskin, and Gosse, in an exploration of his relationship with his father. As it is, the discussion of Powys simply confirms the existing prejudices of a public unversed in the *Autobiography*, and ignores the chance to shift emphases.

He is, perhaps, on safer ground, where he is less likely to be challenged, in his other sections. His analyses of *Praeterita* ("surely one of the greatest of autobiographies") and *Father and Son*, for example, follow expected paths, for "The Dedicated Child" is a less controversial "central idea" by which to define Ruskin and Gosse than "The Quest" for Powys, for in both cases so obviously the child is father to the man and parental influence the over-riding agent in development. Nearly every autobiographer (as opposed to biographer) is likely to devote what seems like a disproportionate amount of his narrative to an analysis of childhood and early youth—the time, that is, when he is determining his own identity—and Mr Cockshut reflects this in the structure of his book. Half the sections are concerned explicitly with childhood ("Childhood", "The Child Alone", "The Child at Home", "The Dedicated Child") and it is a prominent theme in every example he examines. The experiences of childhood, which are to be the material of influences for life, are evidence which is denied to the biographer, however conscientious. The author points to the reminiscences of Elizabeth Sewell, the High Church novelist, and comments that she

can convey all the tone of her home, and of early religious and moral life by two sharp

instances. She says that it seemed as if she was marked for life when detected in a frightened lie; and when she read the story of Jephthah's vow, she wondered whether she was not bound in conscience to kill her mother because she thought she had made a vow to do so.

He concludes that she has now said all necessary about "family discipline, about Protestant attitudes to the Old Testament, about the duty of truth-telling", because the vivid details of memory, "carrying [their] unanswerable guarantee of significance, can never quite be equalled even by the most striking piece of evidence among a biographer's materials". This seems to be another example, like the one of Powys already quoted, where the author is manipulating his facts to suit his thesis. Readers of Elizabeth Sewell's *Autobiography* will know that she spent almost none of her childhood at home, as she was sent to boarding school when she was only four, and remained there, at one institution or another, until she was fifteen. The incidents which, Mr Cockshut says, "can convey all the tone of her home" were, first, for a misdemeanour at school, and, second, the morbid "fancy" of a lonely adolescent who had nobody near to consult, and which she cured herself "when my own common-sense told me [it] must be stopped at all hazards" (*Autobiography*, p. 25).

He draws on the childhood experiences portrayed by other women writers, like Beatrice Webb and Eleanor Farjeon; one omission, odd in the context, perhaps, because so wholly appropriate to this thesis, is Charlotte Yonge, the novelist of the Oxford Movement, whose autobiography evokes all the ambience of childhood in the intense and rather humourless confines of an Anglican family of the old High, Non-Juring persuasion. The little Charlotte, brought forbidden buttered bread by an indulgent nurse-maid, records her virtuous refusal of the treat, and her denunciation of poor Bessie. Mr Cockshut stresses, in his analysis of *Father and Son*, that the Gosse household was in every way exceptional, and adds "[it] has often been misinterpreted by being supposed much more typical than it actually was" of the surrounding Protestant society. Charlotte Yonge's childhood recorded in her autobiography, confirms the typicality of Elizabeth Sewell's: together they are a witness to the oppressiveness and rigour of an up-bringing in a stern Anglican

(both would have indignantly rejected Mr Cockshut's word "Protestant") household or background.

Carlyle said, "A Man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him", and Mr Cockshut concurs heartily. Religion is the central theme of most of the lives he treats, and he is at his best in the final chapter on "Conversion"—he moves into top gear, indeed, in his discussion of Newman. He writes with authority and confidence, and there is no faulting his facts or his emphases in an area he knows as well as this.

BARBARA DENNIS

T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist,
MARIUS BUNING.

Rodopi, Amsterdam, Hfl.90*

Marius Buning, a Dutch scholar and critic of T. F. Powys, is free of what he called, in an essay on allegory and myth published in 1976 (in words that would be generally less applicable now), "the typically British disdain or even refusal to discuss literary issues thoroughly from a theoretical point of view". Now, with the publication of his dissertation, *T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist*, Dr Buning gives substantial proof of his contention, made in the same essay, that "only in conjunction can literary criticism and literary theory, or pragmatics and poetics yield that fiction about literature that we call criticism".

The purpose of his book is to examine *Mr Weston's Good Wine* and *Unclay* "in the light of modern allegorical theory", and "to show how a proper understanding of the allegorical mode which gives these novels their shape, their life and their profundity, will enrich our reading and appreciation of them". The book consists of "A Polemical Introduction", a chapter on Romantic and modern theories of allegory, which makes exacting, but relatively jargon-free use of the revaluation of this ancient concept which structuralist and post-structuralist theories have effected, two chapters on allegorical structure and *Mr Weston's Good Wine* and *Unclay* respectively, and three appendices concerned with literary references and allusions in the two novels, and classical references and

**T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist* is available to *Powys Review* readers direct from the publishers at £15.00—Ed.

allusions in *Unclay*. While there are parts of the book that will be difficult for all except fellow literary theoreticians to grasp, it is, for the most part, easy to read, with an undogmatic polemic edge, and in addition to the main thrust of the argument, text and notes together contain some absorbing comment on relevant philosophical and theological matters.

Dr Buning shows how it emerges from recent theories of allegory that

with the advent of the Enlightenment allegory radically changed its purpose, although not its method; from being an essentially *affirmative* mode of writing, which celebrated a structured, authoritative and basically Christian view of reality, it became an increasingly *ironic* mode of writing, sceptical of any publicly shared cosmic or collective system of thought or values, and concerned with highly subjective and fragmented presentations of reality and the self.

He sees T. F. Powys as a significant writer within the tradition as a whole, and specifically as a modernist in the "ironic mode", in that, compared to Bunyan's allegory, for example, Powys's allegory is "highly subjective if not idiosyncratic". It is evident, however, that Powys depended heavily upon the existence of traditional meanings for his effects, and his play upon the Bible, in particular, determines the character of a large part of his work. Since intertextuality is one of Dr Buning's main interests, he is especially alert to Powys's use of pre-texts to undermine the original meanings of literary and scriptural tradition.

Dr Buning bases his theory of allegory on Angus Fletcher's *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964), which is itself based on Coleridge's definition, and indebted to Northrop Frye. There is, however, a great difference between the view of allegory held by Coleridge and other Romantics and that of its modern theoreticians, which Dr Buning is at pains to explain and emphasize. In the modern view, allegory remains "an essentially polysemous, metaphorical language construct" and its doubleness of meaning is axiomatic, but now, with loss of "the belief that spiritual truth is somehow embodied in language", it is no longer seen, as it was by the Romantics, as inferior to symbolism, which for Coleridge was characterized by "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal". Dr Buning's use of Fletcher's theory

is in line with the view—I would say, article of faith—widely held among intellectuals at present, that all systems of thought or belief, ideas of readily, and literary works, including criticism, are fictions or imaginative constructs, and his employment of the five key features of Fletcher's theory as analytic tools retains their "mythic" provenance. These are, in the terms of Dr Buning's subheadings to his chapters on the two novels: "Daemonic Agency", "Cosmic Imagery", "Patterns of Symbolic Action", "Forms of Magical Causation", and "Thematic Effects". It is an attractive feature of the book that in applying these terms rigorously, Dr Buning never pretends to be a scientist, or loses sight of the fact that his criticism is fiction, albeit better able than other theoretical constructs to interpret the art under discussion.

The approach adopted in *T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist* is particularly illuminating when applied to Powys's concern in his novels with creativity. Thus, in writing about *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, Dr Buning looks closely at the "parallel between divine and artistic creation" in Mr Weston's character as "author" both of the Bible and of Creation. He develops the theme in showing the connections between *Mr Weston's Good Wine* and *Unclay*, especially in the "close link between Mr Weston as writer and John Death as ideal reader", and points out, justly, as far as I know, that "this aspect of John Death's character, together with the many allusions and references to literature and to the act of reading as well as writing, have received no attention from the critics so far". I am also convinced by the larger claim, made in forthright, but courteous terms, that the treatment of Powys as an allegorist is more effective than a critical "preoccupation with the canons of expressive and psychological realism" in vindicating his achievement.

A reader of Dr Buning's book is likely to emerge from it with an enhanced sense of both the subtlety of Powys's art and the sophistication of his exploration of forms of creativity, and therefore of his modernity as writer and thinker. It would be unfair, though, to imply that Dr Buning emphasizes Powys's artfulness, and playful way with traditional meanings, at the expense of his metaphysical and moral concerns. On the contrary, he shows that the question of theodicy is central to both novels, and makes a good case for seeing Powys as a philosophical pessimist. But Dr Buning is less receptive to Powys's comedy, and this may be

graver limitation than at first appears. The following passage should help to show what I mean:

The very conception of the Bible as a somewhat imperfect work of art (since it leaves out much of the truth in order not to offend the public), the virtual equation between the Bible and the good wine as forms of illusion, and Mr Weston's apparent endorsement of the sexual impulse, create considerable tension and confusion for most readers of the novel, which may well have been the author's intention.

My quarrel is not with the unorthodoxy that Dr Buning ascribes to Powys, but with the effects that he believes may have been the author's intention. As a reader of the novel, and from having discussed it with others who have enjoyed it, I can report a good deal of laughter in response to *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, but not much—let alone “considerable”—“tension and confusion”. Dr Buning speaks of “Powys's view of the artist as a species of God viewing his own creation with a smile”, but although he partially quotes the view of the narrator of *Unclay* that “Perhaps the most entertaining madness in the world is religion. Those who destroy religion will destroy merriment too. It is a crazedness to believe, but also a happy fancy,” he says nothing about Powys's sense of fun or merriment. But Powys's fun at the expense of concepts of God and Death helps both to reinforce the humility with which he mocks his own pretensions as artist and truth-teller, and to enhance the meditative element in his writing, which dwells on our blindness in face of inconceivable absolutes, and stimulates reflection and a sense of awe in the reader. That, at any rate, is how I apprehend Powys's “mysticism”, which, in the mature work, expresses itself more by comedy than by disturbance.

Dr Buning speaks of Coleridge's “period-bound literary framework and horizon”. But this, surely, is unwise; for how shall we know how we and our myths appear from a larger overview? The modern idea that all conceptions of reality are fictions may itself be, not the wisdom of scepticism, but a myth hiding the laws to which we are actually subject. Powys's only reference to the word allegory occurs, as Dr Buning tells us in a note, in “When Thou Wast Naked”:

All things that happen, he knew, are only the scenes out of one play, presented a little differently perhaps, but with always the same

players. And the play that is acted allegorically, to a finite mind, is everlasting.

It is Mr Priddle who knows, and although we have no right to refer the knowledge to a system of orthodox belief, and ascribe it to Powys, it accords with the intimations of infinite and everlasting perspectives with which he teases our finite minds.

My disagreement with Dr Buning centres on Powys's comedy and its relation to what I apprehend as the Christian *spirit*, as opposed to the letter of the Law (which he mocks), in his writing. It has to be admitted, though, that these are matters of personal interpretation, in which I differ from Dr Buning mainly in response to the comedy, and the question of how much it qualifies and even transforms the anti-affirmative irony and the pessimism in the work. There is no disagreement between us over the importance of Powys's preoccupation with divine and human creativity, and with man and God as inventors of equivocal, far from perfect stories, and I am persuaded by his absorbing book that his treatment of Powys as an allegorist is essential to a proper evaluation and interpretation of Powys's art. *T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist* will no doubt be of considerable interest to students of allegory; it is certainly a major contribution to Powys studies.

JEREMY HOOKER

Three Fantasies,
JOHN COWPER POWYS.

Carcamet, 1985, £8.95.

In an informative “Afterword” in Carcamet's elegant edition of J. C. Powys's last three works of fiction, Glen Cavaliero suggests that they could well be described as “the juvenilia of his old age”. That description, offered implicitly as an alternative to “senilia” is perhaps unnecessarily defensive, even though it arises from an understandable concern that Powys's final writings should not be dismissed as “the playthings of a literary senescence”. If the reader—especially the reader new to Powys—approaches *Three Fantasies* with expectations of encountering conventional narrative fiction, he is bound to be disappointed. But if these final fragments are disregarded as stories, there remain several reasons to value and enjoy them. They are not

examples, good or bad, of “space fiction” or “science fantasy” or any other conventional category of story. They are not stories at all. They constitute glosses on the major writings, both fictional and philosophical, of Powys’s earlier years.

In his best novels, the “famous narratives” as G. Wilson Knight called the novels from *Wolf Solent* to *Maiden Castle*. Powys enforced upon himself a discipline that excluded too indecorous an expression of his obsessions: the sexual preoccupations, though permeating the narrative, are usually subordinated to the demands of narrative structure. His “ideas”, for which he claimed that the novels were propaganda, are embodied in characters and personal relations that are dramatized in an intricate pattern of action. In *Three Fantasies* Powys dispenses almost entirely with notions of personality, is only incidentally concerned with personal relations, does not attempt to dramatize anything of significance, and provides no coherent pattern of action. The “ideas” predominate. And most of the “ideas” are primarily the products of sexual fantasy. What are given here are all the “queer ideas” (though they are scarcely as uncommon as Powys insisted) that inhabit the minds of the heroes in the novels, as they inhabited their creator’s mind throughout his long life. In the novels the heroes are not allowed to divulge their fantasies in their essential details, though much of their general nature is hinted at. Here, however, the fantasies are foregrounded; the heroes are redundant.

I do not wish to give the impression that there is anything salacious in this book. While nudity, male and female masturbation, male and female homosexuality, incest, sadism, and rape all figure, and while “fuck”, “prick”, “bum” and “quim” appear here and there, they exist only as ideas or words. There is no graphic description of sexual acts or feelings, no visualization of perverted encounters between characters—for there are no real characters and no development of situation in which such encounters could be made vivid. The writing is provocative only in the way that a taboo idea may be provocative when thrown incongruously into polite conversation. Such provocativeness is the keynote of much of the style of *Three Fantasies*. The ideas that are voiced are not in themselves especially unusual or outrageous; they are made to seem so only because they appear in inappropriate contexts.

The first of the pieces, which was written in

1959, is entitled *Topsy-Turvy*. It begins in the manner of nursery tales that present outwardly inanimate objects as secretly animate:

The Grey Armchair gazed across the little room at the Brown Armchair. They were in opposite corners; the grey one in the south corner and the brown one in the north corner of the room.

‘Whirlwind and Whirlpool have left us quiet today,’ said Mr Grey Armchair.

‘I don’t think it’ll last long,’ replied Mrs Brown Armchair, ‘I seem to feel a certain motion of air coming in through the sides of the window.’

‘I hope,’ said Mr Grey Armchair, ‘that they won’t carry Topsy away again. I don’t at all like seeing her whirled down our little square and carried over the wall into the green fields . . .’

Topsy is the soul of a picture of a girls’ tea-party. After an absence during which she has been whirled away, she returns safely, reassuring her boyfriend Turvy (who is the soul of a door-knob):

‘Don’t ’ee mind, darling! I didn’t let Whirlwind carry me as far as it wanted to. It wanted to carry me to where Whirlpool was waiting to swallow me up. But I was too clever for the wicked old whoremonger. I pretended I wanted to take off some of my clothes before being swallowed up, but I said I was too shy to do it before anybody, so I begged to be allowed to go into that little wood called Bushes Home. But once there of course I ske-daddled, and soon got into Wash Lane and over the wall into our Turnstile Corner.’

The cosy nursery-tale tone is abruptly shattered by the word “whoremonger”, and little Topsy’s apparent naiveté is belied by the knowingness of her ruse.

Other “characters” in the opening chapter include Big Doll and Little Doll:

In her parlour Mrs Sideboard Chest-of-Drawers was contemplating Big Doll and Little Doll as they talked together sitting on their bed, which Master Big Doll had just assisted Missy Little Doll in making very tidy. They had slept late, or rather Master Doll had slept till ten; and from ten to twelve till Rocking-Chair came rickety-crickety down the nine stairs, they had been talking together while they made their bed tidy. Big Doll had

been telling Little Doll about their first night together in Mrs Sideboard Chest-of-Drawers' parlour, when he had explained to her that he never would ravish her because he didn't want to have the anxiety of their having children.

Again, the conventional make-believe world that is thought proper for young children is suddenly subverted by the word "ravish" and the "queer idea" of non-consummation.

The nursery-tale parody is not sustained for long. Topsy and Turvy escape from their "normal" existence to a land of clouds where they encounter the naked forms of a series of famous persons, from Dido and Aeneas to Rudyard Kipling and Rider Haggard. The meetings provide an opportunity for further comic irreverence, as, for example, in the portrayal of Samson and Delilah:

'What I would like best to see,' the wife was saying, 'would be the Chief Executioner of the Philistines standing upon your body, naked as it is now, and very carefully and slowly cutting out all your principal organs one by one and arranging them separately on a silver plate at your side. When it comes to your testicles, or knackers, or balls, as my little brother told me they called them at school, I should like to see him put them on the plate with the rest but on the opposite side, not close together. They are things I have suffered from: and I want to see *them* suffer in their turn. Oh yes! And your villainous penis, or prick, as my little brother said they called it at school, that I would love to see *cut off* and laid on the centre of the plate with its head propped up on a little pebble so that it would point upwards into the clouds, the winds, while its voice would cry pitifully "I'm dissolving! I'm going! I'll soon be lost forever!"'

'Can't you hold your wholesome tongue for one single second?' groaned the voice of Samson. 'If I weren't brought up in the courts of the Lord I would teach you how to talk to me like this!'

Finally, Topsy and Turvy return to their home in company with the sea-nymph Galatea, whose arrival causes general confusion. Amidst the confusion Big Doll is unaccountably driven to change his previous forbearance towards Little Doll and violently rapes her. And thus the "story" ends.

Although the nursery-tale parody provides *Topsy-Turvy* with a kind of narrative frame-

work, the shape of the narrative is largely irrelevant. What holds the reader's attention is the Rabelaisian exuberance with which Powys treats the taboo subjects of his Victorian childhood and youth, and parades his "queer ideas" as if they were the natural stuff of avuncular entertainment for young children.

Cataclysm, written in early 1960, begins as though it might develop into a neatly structured apocalyptic fable, about a young man called Yok Pok who dreams of destroying human life in order to liberate animals from human exploitation. Such expectations are soon undermined, however, when the organizing principle of the narrative is revealed as the free association of ideas. The focus changes from character to character not according to any dictates of "story" but according to shifts from one "queer idea" to another.

Many of the ideas are already fully present in Powys's novels, and their treatment in *Cataclysm* is of slight interest. Powys's complex and confused notions about space and time, his interest in the communion of bodiless minds, the longing to possess divine powers, and abhorrence of vivisection are not given any new light. The writing becomes more vigorous when he concerns himself with questions of an overtly sexual nature, such as when the girl Nelly, who is desperately trapped in a bodiless world of pure spirit, makes an impassioned plea for sexual pleasure, especially "the delicate art of masturbation", to be given its rightful place in "this skull-thumping, idea-worshipping world". She deplores the teaching of children that sexual thoughts are wicked, and pours scorn on the puritanical mind, "a mind whose ferocious and savage hatred of sexual pleasure has caused one of the largest and most genial fountains of human sympathy that we possess to dry up at the source".

There Powys speaks as an "ardent advocate of sexual thought". In an earlier passage he is in more jocular mood, and presents an encounter between Why Ki, who is human, and Ve Zed, who comes from another world. Ve Zed's physical organs are distributed in a startlingly different way from those of Why Ki. Ve Zed has many eyes all down his front, many mouths all down his back, and his sexual organs on his hip:

'I suppose,' Why said, 'a girl's quim would be just opposite the prick and balls at your side?' The other boy chuckled naughtily. 'I certainly hope so.'

Powys's comic fantasizing has there provided an elegant surreal solution to the problem of consummation without confrontation.

Abertackle, written in the spring of 1960, is the most incoherent of the three pieces. Glen Cavaliero suggests that its composition was interrupted by illness with the result that "the story falls into two virtually unconnected parts, exhibiting some forgetfulness and confusion". The first part, however, scarcely promises a connected story. In some respects it reads like a parody of brother Theodore's fables of country life, introducing satirically a host of eccentric villagers whose principal activity is gossip. Some of the jokes are very good, as in the delightful anecdote about the Reverend Squot's success in persuading Bickery Bum and Fanny Flabbergast to regularize their union, so that they can "sleep in the same bed and worship God without restriction by making as much love as they like". But totally unlike Theodore's meticulously constructed narratives, Powys's rural satire proceeds by inconsequentiality, until eventually he abandons the exercise entirely and switches abruptly to the realm of space fantasy, where prolonged aerial love-making forms the background to encounters with the Devil.

Instead of being presented to the reader as a continuous narrative, *Abertackle* might best have been printed as a series of fragments, as has been done with the "notebooks" of several important writers. Indeed, the same might have been done for *Topsy-Turvy* and *Cataclysm*. The material in *Three Fantasies* certainly rewards close attention but presenting it in the guise of long short stories is a disservice both to the reader and to Powys's reputation, much as one must be grateful to have the material in print at all. The pieces are not less interesting for being an old man's self-indulgent doodling. They are clearly psychological autobiography, and they also constitute a challenge to Powys's readers to confront those "queer ideas" that provide such an important driving force in the novels. Used as "notebooks", *Three Fantasies* could enable the stuff that Powys's dreams were made of to assist in illuminating certain crucial aspects of the novels. No longer in fear of the "Moral Censor" that frustrated him in the writing of the novels, Powys gives free rein in these final pieces to the obsessions, principally sexual, that course discontentedly beneath the surface of his major works.

IAN HUGHES

George Herbert and Henry Vaughan,
Edited by LOUIS L. MARTZ.

Oxford University Press, 1986, £17.50.

The works of two major seventeenth-century poets with firm Welsh connections have recently been republished together as part of the new "Oxford Authors" series. George Herbert, perhaps the greatest of all English devotional poets, was born into a distinguished Welsh family in Montgomery, possibly in the castle itself, in 1593; Henry Vaughan, poet and physician, spent most of his long life in the Usk valley and proudly called himself "the Silurist". There is indeed excellent justification, beyond this shared Welsh background, for putting the work of the two poets into one volume. Not only did their poetry grow out of the same ecclesiastical inheritance, the language and liturgy of the post-Elizabethan Church of England; more binding still is Vaughan's sense of discipleship to the older poet, whom he described as that "blessed man" whose "holy life and verse gained many pious converts (of whom I am the least)". To read the output of the two poets side by side is thus to be presented with many consistent features—technical invention, biblical language, "metaphysical" wit, colloquial ease with the divine, and profoundly imaginative perceptions of God—and yet the shared volume helps also to remind us that Vaughan was no pale imitator of Herbert's lyrics. Where Herbert is precise, Vaughan is expansive; where Herbert surprises by irony and subtlety, Vaughan startles with visions and "watchfulness".

The decision to publish the work of the two poets together was, therefore, appropriate and fruitful in several ways. In fact, the Oxford Authors series, under the general editorship of Frank Kermode, so far seems most promising. The format of the books will no doubt be very appealing to students, with clearly printed texts in modern spelling editions which, in their paperback versions, are quite reasonably priced. They also manage to pack a lot into one volume. In this case, the Herbert material consists of his complete English poems and the prose handbook *A Priest to the Temple*, an important gloss on the poetry; all of Vaughan's religious lyrics are supplied, and a useful comparative selection from his earlier secular love poems. (The equivalent volume of Ben Jonson's work comprises two full-length plays, two collections of critical prose, and all his poems—thoroughness

indeed!) The editors, too, are well chosen, being for the most part distinguished critics who have worked in their field for some time. This is particularly true of Louis Martz, editor of the Herbert and Vaughan volume, who in 1954 virtually founded modern scholarship of the seventeenth-century English religious lyric with his critical book *The Poetry of Meditation* and has since contributed criticism of great distinction on Herbert, Vaughan and their contemporaries.

Martz's short introduction is, not surprisingly, an elegant and wise essay, notably skilful in the way that it gives the impression of dealing with the two poets simultaneously while in fact offering two quite distinct discussions. He offers an exemplary reading of "The Holdfast" to demonstrate the deliberate theological ambiguity of Herbert's poems and their consequent accessibility to readers of Calvinist or Laudian leanings; what mattered to Herbert was not controversy or "curious questions", but the discovery of a right relationship—personal and poetic—with Christ. Vaughan's priorities were similar, though darkened by the sorrows and bitterness of the civil war which Herbert did not live to experience. Martz aptly characterizes their distinctive poetic skills, highlighting this difference of mood: where Herbert is forever condensing and controlling his wit, Vaughan's instinctive direction is outward, seeking and, sometimes, glimpsing the light beyond "these masques and shadows". Martz is right, too, to stress the presence of Jonsonian forms in Vaughan's lyrics, despite the prevailing influence of Herbert; further, he gives a sample reading of Vaughan's meditative poem "I walked the other day" as typical of the poet's method of progress by association rather than by rhetoric and craft as in Herbert's lyrics.

In dealing with the presentation of the poetic text, Martz has not made radical editorial decisions—limited, perhaps, by a certain obligation to base his text on the earlier Oxford English Texts editions by Hutchinson and Martin. This is, it seems to me, a weakness of Martz's edition, since the earlier textual decisions deserve closer scrutiny and in some cases should be overruled. However, Martz has largely confined his task to modernizing the O.E.T. versions, and this he and his team of research assistants have done with considerable tact; they have preserved for example, old spellings in Herbert's poems where puns or rhymes are involved, and have retained the use of italics, so important in the

work of both poets as a means of emphasis or distinction of voices. Martz's other main editorial task, the annotation of the poems, is the most disappointing feature of the volume. The notes, tucked at the end of the book are, though clear and accurate, desperately thin—the penalty one has to pay, no doubt, for the comprehensive range of texts included in the volume. However, these notes do represent a retrograde movement, being much less helpful than those in the original O.E.T. edition of Herbert (which themselves badly need updating) and a good deal less thorough than those prepared by Alan Rudrum for his Penguin edition of Vaughan. The major appeal of Martz's edition, therefore, will not be the secondary material which it offers, but the substantial amount of primary text in modernized form and attractive print.

The positive decision to publish the poetry of Herbert and Vaughan together is in the long run more significant than the poverty of annotation in this edition. The joint volume hints, for example, at the growing sense (if not a trend in reality) that current students of literature are less likely than in the past to read "the major author" in isolation, but will be encouraged to make comparisons, distinctions, generic or historical connections. It also suggests not only that Herbert continues to be popular with students and lecturers (witness the "renaissance" in Herbert critical studies over the last decade or so) but that Vaughan is at last being seen as a major companion to Herbert and no longer as a minor metaphysical poet with obscure hermetic ideas. This Oxford volume demonstrates the very direct appeal of the art of both poets, as in the stunning immediacy of Vaughan's claim, "I saw Eternity the other night / Like a great *Ring* of pure and endless light"; or the freshness of the "returns" of Herbert's God, "sweet and clean" as "the flowers in spring". The poets knew a common despair as well as God's visionary presence or close friendship. Herbert experienced the isolating effect of God's apparent silence, when his own soul lay like an abandoned musical instrument, "untuned, unstrung", and Vaughan lived all too often in metaphoric "mists and black days". The triumph of each poet over such discouragement was characteristically expressed: in Herbert, the quiet achievement of a mysterious "something understood", the simple resolution to "sit and eat" at God's banquet only after the complexity of debate and resistance; in Vaughan, the ability to find "sublime" truths in "mystical" nature

and to perceive, despite our “fleshly dress”, the early growth of “bright shoots of everlastingness”. Even if Martz’s edition does not help the reader through the hidden glories of the texts as fully as it might, the availability of the complete religious lyrics of these two poets together in an accessible form is surely to be commended.

HELEN WILCOX.

The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy,
J. B. BULLEN.

Clarendon Press, Oxford; 1986, £27.50.

J. B. Bullen’s new book on Hardy and the role played by the visual in his novels is a welcome addition to Hardy scholarship. The inclusion of 37 illustrations, both historic and contemporary works (paintings, illustrations, and engravings), enrich the text. At the very least, they in large part enable us to recreate and discover the influences shaping Hardy as Victorian artist. Some are more specifically used by Bullen to illustrate and explicate some of the images or references Hardy makes in the text. Thus the inclusion of these visual works, at the most, enables us to discover Hardy’s fictional texts more fully than we would be able to do without these illustrations.

The Expressive Eye explains why we respond the way we do—and why the novels and characters often respond in the way they do—in the novels of this very visually oriented writer. Bullen seems to operate from the position that it is not enough to accept that certain things happen, or that characters respond in certain ways, without seeking to explain the reasons for those responses. Bullen’s book adds some valuable information to the work that earlier Hardy critics (Jean Brooks, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure*, and Penelope Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality*) have done to open up new critical vistas in Hardy scholarship, particularly in the working of this author’s visual imagination. In many cases, Bullen gives us valuable historical information, and artistic insight into Hardy’s creativity.

The chronological arrangement of this study is not unusual in the critical response to Hardy’s work, but the choices for emphasis are intriguing. The study chronologically moves through

Hardy’s career as a novelist (rather than as a poet), after a preliminary (and necessary) explanation of Hardy’s biographical relation to the visual arts—his knowledge of the London art world, the exhibitions and paintings that he either did see or most likely would have seen, his response to contemporaries such as Ruskin, the continental travels which gave him a visual familiarity with Italian art. We learn that early visits to the International Exhibition at South Kensington and later visits to the National Gallery stocked his mind with images from the art world that Hardy was to make strong use of in his career as novelist.

In the fundamental explanation of how Hardy’s visual imagination was formed, Bullen reaches one of the strong assertive statements that mark his study—and critical style: Hardy’s “taste was passionate, eclectic, and highly personal, and it grew out of a faith in the expressive power of the image”. We move to the conclusion (with Bullen) that Hardy understood Turner’s work as “the quintessence of expressiveness; they were ‘landscape *plus* a man’s soul’”. The visual expression Hardy uses in his novels, Bullen demonstrates, is a creative and highly stylized method of dealing with the plot and character realities (and even the unrealities) that are the substance of his fiction.

Bullen then reaches into the novels to demonstrate how Hardy uses his acquired knowledge or instinctive taste and touch to create the terms of each novel’s visual world. Minor and preliminary novels receive shortened examination, with more emphasis, as might be expected, given to the major works in Hardy’s canon from *Far from the Madding Crowd* to *Jude the Obscure*. Some interesting features here must be mentioned. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* receives considerable attention, as does *A Laodicean* and *The Well Beloved*. For the first, this is an important critical stand to take on the important and much underrated or neglected early work. For *A Laodicean*, the comments are a welcome recognition of this intellectually and metaphorically important novel, though it is not really a “good” example of Hardy’s creative powers. (It is not a strong novel, though Bullen encourages my own position that it is really a curious and “interesting” insight into Hardy’s powers and weaknesses as a novelist and thinker.) The final novel receives explanation and comment that, again, demonstrates the highly idiosyncratic and even experimental position Hardy often takes. As we learn to appreciate, if we hadn’t been so

conscious of it before, Hardy was no static artist, and each of his novels, but more importantly those novels that “work” as fiction, call into creation a different part of his artistic sense.

The critical handling of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a refreshing addition to Hardy scholarship, as the novel is most often dismissed as only an early attempt at creating fiction. As Bullen explains, however, this novel presents a new development compared with the two previous works. It marks “the point in Hardy’s career at which he began to develop an organic connection between the features of a plot and the visual component through which that plot is expressed”. Displacement, the silhouette, synecdoche (the pair of blue eyes)—these constitute a highly stylized character creation, and one that is highly visual in its expression. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, too, Hardy demonstrates a rich visual sense of Bathsheba Everdene’s world. More importantly, Bullen explains how the visual sense (ours and Hardy’s) works in this novel. Not only does Hardy present the descriptive richness of scene and setting (what is to be seen) but also the philosophic question (how it is to be seen and understood)—and even the ultra-philosophic question, is what is seen really seen? Is it truth? Hardy does not completely focus on the philosophic point—but at least raises the question. As Bullen so accurately and persuasively discovers, the novel is “a meditation on the way in which the sense of sight feeds the mind with information about the material world”. And there is more of such wonderfully strong and assertive statements from this critic, as we follow his own growth to knowledge as he explains how and even why Hardy so deftly handles the visual sense and motif of this early novel.

The heart of this critical work, however, is actually the heart of Hardy’s own canon: *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. A considerable amount of space is given over to the connection Hardy makes between Rembrandt and the face of Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*. Yeobright has the “countenance of the future”, as Hardy tells us, and the “intensity of his history” causes the premature ageing of his features. Bullen’s account of the relationship between Hardy’s text, contemporary portraiture and the revival of interest in portraiture, and the contemporary understanding and evaluation of Rembrandt’s strengths in portraiture constitutes one of the strengths of this study. Physiognomic imagery casts new light into character conflicts and rel-

ationships, and gives the novel a philosophic (and physiognomic) meaning. Bullen convinces us that Hardy meant it to be so, and thus we cannot fail to have new respect for Hardy’s great gifts as an artist.

The importance Bullen finds in the facial imagery in *The Return of the Native* does not extend, however, to Hardy’s novel, *A Laodicean*. The fault is Hardy’s, and not Bullen’s, as this critic gives valuable treatment and explanation to the visual element in this work. The gothicism Bullen finds in the portraiture, which is a major issue of the novel, has a certain kind of fascination, and one can almost feel Hardy becoming engrossed with portraits, as he had been with faces in earlier works. The historical information about Hardy’s reading while he was in the midst of writing this novel dispels the notion that Hardy was not intellectual. However, Bullen’s information explains why this novel has never been considered one of Hardy’s strong works. So interested was Hardy in capturing the history of the De Stancy portraits that he layered his text with curious commentaries on the facial similarities between the figure in the portrait and the real human beings in the De Stancy castle. Hardy’s attempts to make “connections” between topical scientific advances (photography), genealogy (the family portraits) and archaeology (the De Stancy castle) are precisely why this novel is not good art. As Bullen rightly explains, Hardy’s illness during the writing of this work must have had a deleterious effect on his strength—and judgment—for the novel is a distinct failure, but especially so after the strength of *The Return of the Native*.

Bullen’s study must inevitably also include *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, but here Bullen does not present as strong a case (nor as unusual in its explications) as he does for the earlier works. However, he does give a solid explication of the architectural metaphor, the use of the “double”, and the contribution of the clock image—though none of this seems as original as the critical display for other novels—yet *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is considered one of the best (if not the best) of Hardy’s works. Bullen’s contribution to Hardy studies at this point is that once again he demonstrates how ideas and images come together, as Hardy creates the terms of his fictional world. This critical stance is also taken for the commentary on *The Woodlanders*, as Bullen continues his explanation of how Hardy artistically “conceptualizes” his

ideas through visual images. The conclusion here is that Darwinian philosophy had destroyed the joy to be found in nature and the interaction between man and nature that Hardy had so skilfully used as a basis of his own and his characters' perception in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In *The Woodlanders* "'Colouring and moulding' of things are determined by forces and ideas beyond our control". As the explanation reveals, the pessimism that had already appeared in earlier works now has a clear Darwinian basis.

In his critical commentary for the final three novels, Bullen continues to argue the very strong connection between Hardy's Darwinian perception of nature and its powers, and its influence on his choice of image and metaphor. In *Tess*, the references to Pater and various mythologies do provide valuable insight into how Hardy was working with the visual in this novel, but Bullen's text here is not as well organized as in the earlier sections, and his references obscure the actual visual experience Hardy was able to create in the novel. (There is the sense here that Hardy's references are critically over-explained for the health of the text.) But a valuable observation for another novel indicates that the problem may be more Hardy's than Bullen's. *Jude* (and *Father Time*, even more so) has lost so much vitality, so much of the sheer joy found in nature and in man's relation with nature, that one begins to realize that Hardy has changed in his perceptions and in the way he uses image and metaphor. If they are laboured in *Tess*, they are absent, really, in *Jude the Obscure*. *Jude* continues the despair, the loss of vitality, the loss of an eye for nature and its richness and joy, a loss that had also been an important part of *The Well Beloved*. What marks this novel is a loss of the joy in nature, the loss of the visual and metaphoric—and, at heart, realistic—joy that *Bathsheba* and *Oak* surely enjoyed, and that even characters in later novels at least recognized, even though their own problems kept them from totally rejoicing in nature's richness: "the death of the sensuous side of Jocelyn's nature" truly prepares for the unmitigated despair of *Jude the Obscure*. "Again and again in the novels, Hardy equates the act of visual perception, the active enjoyment of sensuous visible form, with vitality and health". But, in *Jude the Obscure* "Hardy has moved into the twilight, into a realm of uniformity and 'obscurity' in which the eye is denied its power and has lost its function". If this does not seem an original commentary on these last three

novels, Bullen's strength, surely, is that he traces and explains just what the pessimism is and how the visual images unmistakably convey the change and loss in "vitality and joy". There are of course extensions of this pessimism that reach into later writers and to our own perceptions, as well as those in our own literature. Bullen does not make these extensions. He doesn't have to.

When thinking back on Bullen's book, we realize that *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and *The Return of the Native* stand out as receiving the major critical explications and statements. It is perhaps no accident that here Hardy finds and expresses vitality and health through his images of man in nature. The experimentation with so many different stylistic techniques here, the examination of the visual methods and insights, give us a very special understanding of Hardy's artistic development. One wonders—if he looked back on his career and examined his work after he had finished with writing his novels, did he see how extraordinarily creative, even idiosyncratic, he was in the early years of his career? That is part of our response to Bullen's study. We ask the question, but this critical study gives the evidence and makes us want to ask—and wonder. The later Hardy is, visually, not as creative, not as stylistically interesting. (We should note that his later plots are somewhat more interesting because of their realistic flavour. What modern reader can fail to find more sympathy—or at least be more fascinated—with the moral travels of *Tess Durbeyfield* and *Sue Bridehead* than with *Bathsheba Everdene*?) Was this loss of his expressive eye, his highly creative visual imagery, due to the loss of his joy in the vitality of nature? *Tess*, *Jude*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, though often seen as such monumental achievements, are not as vital, not as visually creative as earlier works. This new view is not due to a loss within the artist himself, or to a lapse in style, but to a loss in the "vitality and health" of the world he used his eye to recreate for his readers. This last is (still) a critically provocative insight into the cause of Hardy's pessimism.

Perhaps we need to reorganize our thoughts on Thomas Hardy, and this critical study may help us to reassess the artistic achievement of this writer. Bullen's study has a richness that enlarges our understanding of the art of Thomas Hardy. If we think *The Expressive Eye* is almost inundated with critical explication and sometimes with historical information, it is necessary

to give us the understanding that Hardy was more than "good little Thomas Hardy". He was Hardy the artist—a novelist who not only nourished but also enriched the tradition.

ARLENE M. JACKSON

The Landscape of the Welsh Marches,
TREVOR ROWLEY.

Michael Joseph, 1986, £14.95.

No border in Britain is more dramatic than that between England and Wales. So much changes with such suddenness: Midland plain to mountain scenery, the type of agriculture, names of people and places, architecture, men's faces . . . The contrast is greater than that between many continental countries. And all along this invisible line lies a zone, indubitably on the English rather than Welsh side, yet still a kind of "in-between land", a curious, tucked-away country which contains some of the most beautiful small towns in Britain. Trevor Rowley is a peculiarly apt author for this new work on the landscape of the Welsh Marches. A tutor in geography at the University of Oxford and a leading writer on landscape studies, he is also a native of Shropshire and has written extensively on the area.

Prefacing with a summary of its physical geography, Rowley tells the story of the Marches from prehistoric to modern times as it impinges upon, and is affected by, the local landscape. Although not an academic work, and overflowing with photographic illustration, he manages to include enough detailed information for one constantly to be learning something new, and being made curious to know more. While writing a popular work, he avoids the dead language of "tourist-board prose", that curse of modern guide-books, and tells his story well. With the chapter on prehistoric times, the reader's respect is immediately gained by the refusal to simplify or patronize. When the author does not know something, he says so: information about life in the border area before the Roman era is extremely scant and he does not pretend otherwise to make a neat story. This commendable humility (rarest of virtues among scholars) extends to what *is* known too. Rowley gives not only the current view of a phenomenon, but also previous and alternate interpretations. The prominent

Iron Age forts of the region, once thought of as exclusively military constructions, have more recently been recognized as permanent, proto-urban communities with regularly aligned streets, and often supporting specialized groups of craftsmen. It now seems possible too, from recent archaeological data, that they acted as economic and political foci for much wider areas, functioning similarly to later county-towns like Shrewsbury and Hereford. In this way, Rowley reminds his reader that knowledge of the past is a contingent thing, reliant upon a number of interpretations of available information. A healthy awareness of history as an ever-changing succession of theories, coloured by the cultures which produce them, is thus encouraged.

In his discussion of the Marches during the Roman period, the author writes that "although the Roman period in Britain lasted for almost four centuries, relatively little above-ground evidence survives from their occupation in the Welsh Marches". He then surveys what archaeological information there is available in a brief twenty pages (out of two hundred and forty-six). In treating this important period (which accounts, after all, for almost a quarter of our recorded history) so relatively briefly, Rowley is being perhaps excessively cautious about "available evidence" and both more detail and speculation would have been welcome. Proper weight is given, however, to the great town of *Viroconium* (fourth largest in Roman Britain) which stood five miles from present-day Shrewsbury, with a description of the remains, an aerial plan, and several photographs, including one of the marvellous inscriptions recording the erection of the town's forum by the *Civitas Cornovium* in A.D. 130. The position and sophistication of this urban centre in the heart of the Marches, without a supporting villa culture, not only make it an enigmatic and valuable archaeological site, it also challenges the formerly rigid demarcation of the island into a Romanized, cultured South-East and a militarily occupied but otherwise uncivilized zone covering the remainder. As Rowley rightly comments, the farmland around this site, constituting the territory of the *Cornovii*, represents one of the most important archaeological reservoirs anywhere in Britain.

The greater part of the book is then devoted to the Medieval period. This is plainly the period which Rowley regards as having the greatest influence over the landscape and whole chapters are allotted to castles and boroughs, the church,

and the management of woods and parks. The excitement produced in the author by the vigour of the Middle Ages communicates itself to the reader. It was here that the actual *Marchia Wallia* came into being, distinct from both Normanized England and the unconquered "Wales Proper", *Pura Wallia*. In return for establishing control of the region, the Crown granted local lordships to Norman barons who enjoyed considerable autonomy, administering the law, building castles and even waging war without the need to seek royal consent. The author clearly sees the Marches through Norman eyes and regards the landscape as being fundamentally changed and laid-out during this period of "privatized", contracted-out government, when new towns were being planted around market squares, scores of Romanesque churches built and land began to be systematically managed on a really large scale.

In telling his story, Trevor Rowley makes interesting use of place-names to reveal past events, exploiting a kind of archaeology of nomenclature. The interfolding of Welsh and English names shows how the border has changed repeatedly with economic circumstances. Local field-names denoting "marsh" and "heath" indicate the status of this land before the extensive reclamation during the Middle Ages, often carried out by local monasteries. Giraldus Cambrensis, for instance, is quoted accusing the monks in the Marches of "turning a wood into a wheat field". It is surprising to read how far back in history deliberate conservation measures were effected in the area. As early as 1226, for example, iron production in the Penyard Forest was halted by Henry III to stop it being used up entirely for fuel. As well as providing building material, firewood and cover for "deer" (a term, apparently, for anything hunt-able), the great forests of the Marches were also a traditional place of refuge for hermits, heretics and outlaws. Perhaps the proximity of the Welsh hills gave an additional sense of security. This aspect of the period is vividly communicated in a passage from a contemporary chronicle, concerning Hugh le Scot, who was found with venison in the house:

And Hugh fled to the church and when the foresters . . . came thither, they demanded of Hugh whence that venison came. And he, and a certain other person . . . acknowledged that they had killed a hind from whence the venison came. And he refused to leave the

church, but lingered there for a month, and afterwards escaped in the guise of a woman. And he is a fugitive, and Roger of Wellington likewise. It is ordered that they be exacted: and unless they come let them be outlawed.

After all the activity and excitement of the Middle Ages, the post-medieval period in the Marches seems almost anti-climactic. As the chapter on industrial landscape shows, however, this was a place of crucial importance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and for a period was the premier iron-producing area in the world. A vital factor in this explosion of industrialization was the accident of landscape. In Shropshire, in particular, there was a perfect coincidence of minerals and ores for exploitation (in easily accessible strata), of woodland and coalfields (for cheap fuelling of furnaces) and of riverways (for transporting goods away). Despite the well-known museum area of Ironbridge Gorge, it is surprising how little evidence the landscape shows of its industrial past. Many a tranquil, wooded spot, Rowley reminds his reader, was once the site of furious industrial activity. A valuable point made by the author is how much the eighteenth-century industrialization was a continuation of a local tradition rather than something entirely new. The iron-working settlement of *Ariconivm* covered many acres during the Roman period; the monks of Wigmore Abbey are recorded as coalmining extensively in Titterstone Clee during the thirteenth century, and the use of a railway at a mine is said to have caused a riot in Elizabethan times. Attention is drawn, too, to the cast-iron tomb slabs at Burrington, dating back to 1619, produced by the Knight family.

Surveying the development of parks and other designed landscapes, the book notes the importance of two local men, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, to the Picturesque Movement, noting ironically how the Gothic magnificence of the latter's *Downton Castle* (1772-78) was paid for by his family's decidedly unromantic iron furnaces. To read an account of these men's aesthetic principles in the context of a description of the landscape in which they lived, is to realize that, in many ways, the picturesque landscape was an idealized, codified version of the natural scenery of Hereford and Shropshire. The contrast within a single landscape of gentle and rugged scenery, the dominance of medieval architecture, the plentiful ruins, the dramatic swathes of woodland, are all features which

Price and Knight already found around them in the Marches.

In his "Twentieth Century Postscript", the author notes the municipal vandalism practised in several border towns—as throughout the country—during the nineteen-sixties. The replacement of Shrewsbury's Victorian market hall by one of the most astonishingly ugly and tactless buildings in the borders is picked out as an especially dolorous event. On the whole, however, the Welsh Marches have survived intact from unsympathetic urban development (especially during that terrible decade) and still contain some of the finest small towns in England. Rowley draws the reader's attention to the paradox that what has preserved the character and appearance of these country towns (thus helping in the current development of tourism) is their long term running-down over several centuries, due to agricultural decline, communication difficulties and the isolation from large urban markets for local produce. There was simply no economic incentive for developers to spoil them.

It must be said that there are criticisms which may be made of this book. The chronological organization—obviously tempting to an author—is, I believe, a mistake. The most interesting chapters are the thematic ones, those dealing with boroughs and forests for example, and a survey of the whole Marcher landscape on these lines would have been more fruitful for author and reader, and saved both the chore of going through the familiar litany of British history once again. There is only one sparsely marked map of the entire region, with a few other very local plans. Surely a book dealing specifically with a landscape deserves a number of maps as the most effective way of conveying fundamental geographical, geological and other information? One ends the book too, without a clear idea of the population size over the centuries, and of what the people lived on. More detail about changes in agricultural land-use and diet locally would have been welcome as an indication of the most basic link between the landscape and its inhabitants. For a book on landscape, again, one would have expected a more extensive treatment of flora and fauna. The relation of the physical landscape to the Marches' historical status as a border region is not explored in any detail; it would have been interesting to see the nature of the area as a military and political buffer-zone compared with similar regions in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe.

A great lacuna is the lack of any systematic treatment of local domestic buildings. Vernacular architecture is one of the most expressive and delicate indications of the relationship between people and the landscape they inhabit. The pattern of a house and its elements speak volumes about the culture and landscape in which it was originally constructed. There is, lastly, the subjective bias of the work. The author is clearly a "Middle Ages Man" and one only wishes the same detailed treatment he lavishes on the Normans were extended to other periods too. He is also a Salopian, and when he writes "Marches", he invariably means Shropshire and Hereford. Cheshire and Gloucester (let alone Clwyd, Powys and Gwent) suffer from the same relative neglect as the non-medieval periods.

The majority of these are sins of omission only, however. "Landscape" is so big a word, with so many meanings, that it would have been impossible to satisfy every reader's expectations; it would be unreasonable to expect Trevor Rowley to do this without a lifetime's work on a whole series of books. This is a worthwhile and well-written guide to the Welsh Marches, and the story of a particular landscape is revealed as being as exciting, dramatic and ironic as any fictional saga about a human family.

PAUL BENNETT MORGAN

Selected Poems,
LESLIE NORRIS.

Poetry Wales Press, 1986, £3.95 (paperback).

Leslie Norris is a poet who repays long study. Much of his work is stronger than it initially appears, and for this reader at least, many fine things come only slowly to the surface. Before I began this examination of his poems, I was always moved most by such Norris pieces as "Water", "Ransoms", "Early frost", "Lear at Fifty", "Elegy for David Beynon" and "Elegy for Lyn James", this latter strangely not included in the "Selected Poems". The sometimes melancholic and often elegiac tones of these poems, combined with arresting imagery, a superb sense of craft and unobtrusive technique, made them truly memorable. Now, while still admiring this writing, I find myself drawn most to poems I had not paid much previous atten-

Frost" is an example here, while in "It's Somebody's Birthday" I can understand why the boys have to be slim, but surely it's an uncontrollable poetic tic that makes them "silver"? Likewise "Dead Boys" where the nostalgic phrasing used to describe vanished childhood runs dangerously close to cliché. It is at such times that I suspect that Norris's influences are not properly assimilated. In "Now the House Sleeps", a phrase like "massed, appalling forests" speaks too clearly of Edward Thomas, a spirit this writer has never been able to purge completely from his writing. And although Norris learns from Andrew Young the approach to a poem of looking at a familiar natural object and finding in it the unexpected or the disconcerting, I sometimes wish Young's brevity and concision had been more attractive lessons. "Travelling West", "Old Voices", "Now the House Sleeps" and "Mountains Pheasants Polecats" lose their power, and for all of Norris's technical adroitness, ramble towards tedium.

Sometimes there are other, surprising flaws. "Terrible" is a word that becomes less terrible when repeated. Yet shadows, buzzards and curlews are all thus described in passages where understatement, suggestion or imagery would have been more suitable than such an over-literal approach. For occasionally Norris can be too ready to guide his readers towards meaning. In the short "Curlew" we learn that the bird's cry is "terrible", "desolate" and "appalling", and that it "creates a desert". This is clumsy overstatement, the urgent insistence of a writer either under his own spell or unsure of himself. "Curlew" is a poor poem, and its companion "Buzzard" no better. We learn that this bird has a "royal" and an "immaculate" wing. I know what Norris means by "royal", but it's a cliché. The bird has also a "sifting" and a "searchlight" eye, and a "terrible, petulant cry". The poem is a barrage of unwieldy adjectives. I hope I am not blaming Norris for not paring his verses down to the bone; my taste is for poets who are generous with words. But I do at times discover in this writer needless and inappropriate overwriting. Take "Old Voices", a poem about bells. In this I find "permanent hills", "surnamed fathers", "resonant cathedrals", "erratic courage", "keen mourning", "unimpeded air", "brazen complexities", "impermanent peace", "altering voices" and a mass of other adjectival phrases which swell the poem into grossness. Dylan Thomas can be another ghost in these poems.

Yet this is a book in which the fine and the memorable easily outweigh the clumsy or redundant elements. It is also the first in a series of Poetry Wales Press "Selected Poems" which will include some of Wales's best writers, notably Glyn Jones and John Ormond. Leslie Norris's collection is beautifully produced, and has a splendid cover. It is further proof that in Poetry Wales Press we have for the first time ever in Wales an enterprising and energetic publishing house wholly dedicated to the work of English language Welsh writers.

ROBERT MINHINNICK

Horned Poppies . . .,
JOHN COWPER POWYS.

Warren House Press, 1986, £7.50.

This will never do. John Cowper Powys is an important writer whose prose romances are widely admired for their poetic qualities. Many who think highly of the romances, however, steer themselves away from his poems. Attitudes to them swing between nonchalant dismissal or straightforward hostility, and outright refusal to read or listen. I do not share such views, but one would have to be more than a little insensitive not to be aware of them. The truth must be faced: no second edition of Powys's verse collections has ever been called for. The very useful Village Press replicas in no way give the lie to this stark fact. Because the poems have thus once failed to win themselves readers it should be obvious to the meanest intelligence that drastic and imaginative re-thinking needs to be undertaken if they are again to be brought before the public. Powys's poems rightfully have a place in the mainstream of English poetry, and any collection or selection of them that does not do something towards putting them there is but the making of books, of which there is no end. It has long been essential, therefore, that the poems must be presented attractively and imaginatively, and that the reader should at the same time be given as much help as possible. Although there are still many who knew the poet, he first lisped in numbers in the days of William Barnes and published a first collection of poems before Thomas Hardy did. Indeed his last collection had been out some five or six years when Hardy died. Powys's poems can thus already be seen in

their literary historical setting, and materials for imaginative and attractive presentation abound. The *desiderata*, therefore, are easy to see. But the little volume called *Horned Poppies* . . . can hardly be said to meet them.

The basis of the collection is a typescript from which 42 short poems have been printed. No principle of selection is discernible—chronology, sequence, classification, all are wanting. Apart from a small group of poems associated with Phyllis Playter, all is random order or disorder. The bulk of the pieces is mechanically pushed out against the left hand margin, a form of presentation that many people find boring. Yet even exceptions betray carelessness. Those who are interested in such matters—and an editor who is not is no editor—may turn to “The Flute”. This is a poem of four 6 line stanzas. The lines are indented alternately. Such indentation follows neither rhyme nor measure and, for the reader, obscures or destroys the pattern or structure of the stanzas and the poem as a whole. It matters not a whit that a typescript or manuscript may look as if such a meaningless layout were intended. Clearly the editorial hand has to take the tiller. It is equally clear that it does not. “Fair copy” may go awry and a poet may “pass” proofs simply because he wants the book published, and not because he wholeheartedly approves of the translation from “copy” to print. The originals of the typescript already referred to are seldom even “fair copies”. The poem therefore desperately needs an imaginative and competent editor.

Another problem is punctuation. In manuscripts stops often look like dashes or commas, and they have to be sorted out. In *Horned Poppies* . . . what look like dashes in the manuscripts are sometimes sensibly translated into stops for print. On the other hand, one quatrain begins: “She bent and kissed him—On eyes and brow”. It might be best to print: “. . . kissed him. On eyes and brow”. It should not be: “. . . kissed him—on eyes and brow”. Powys marks off from the rest the last two stanzas of this same poem, “Lewtchin”, with a broken line. In print this might tastefully be translated into a row of stars—“* * * * *”—with extra space above and below it. No break of any kind is indicated in *Horned Poppies* . . . Even more unacceptable are passages for which punctuation, although called for by common sense, is not supplied. The last three quatrains—out of four—of “Two Together”, for instance, are stopped at their close. Within these stanzas there is no punct-

uation at all, although it is obviously needed and was expected by the poet. The first stanza is punctuated more waywardly still. Editorial fecklessness of this kind makes nonsense, and is not likely to bring new readers to the poet.

Italics are also used whimsically. In “Horned Poppies”, for example, the poem from which the book takes its title, we read: “sans let”. However, in “Lover’s [*sic*] Quarrels” we are given: “*Sans* cause, *sans* reason, and—dear God! *sans* cesse”. The intention seems to be not to unravel the wool but to tie it in knots. If “*sans*” is italicized to mark the foreign descent of the word, we ought to have “*sans cesse*”. By the same token we ought to have ‘*sans* let’ in “Horned Poppies”. One ought to be able to take common sense for granted—editing without thought is simply not good enough.

Punctuation and italics may seem trivial matters, but one can hardly think that words are of no account. Minor slips, of course, find their way into the best regulated editions. However, it is not a pleasant task to set down a list of mistakes that is bound to seem like a reading lesson, and a few examples only here must serve. The text of “Horned Poppies” already has an interesting “history”. In the typescript of the poem stanzas six to fifteen (out of sixteen) are wanting. They were then recovered from the manuscript. But although this mistake was put right and set up in print some two or three years ago someone else has now altered what had been restored. Thus, one line in the poem begins: “To blue its foliage”. As it stands the verbal construction is the same as in: “to black his boots”. This use of “black” is a long established idiomatic usage known to everyone. But it does not alter the fact that in this poem Powys wrote an exclamatory: “So”. Some readers may think “To blue” an improvement. It is not what Powys wrote. In “How the Mountains of Wales Are Where P.P. Is!” we read the phrase: “. . . walls of barricaded sorcery”. As an editorial concern one may wonder if the exclamation mark at the end of the title—Powys agreed that there was often “too much ! ! !”—should be printed, but let that pass. What he wrote, and what was faithfully copied in the typescript, is: “. . . walls of barricadoed sorcery”. Powys gives poetic magic. Print here topples it down to prose—gone is the magic.

Of help to the reader there is little or none. For this last poem, for instance, an interesting date is available. It is not given. In “The Tree” it is assumed that every schoolchild knows that the “dragon-tree” is the common or garden mono-

cotyledonous *Dracæna Draca*, which easygoing English travellers have been known to call the familiar date tree. If the poet uses such an image the reader at least wants to know what the image is and what it signifies in the poem, and expects the editor to do his work systematically. In this book the reader is let down without apology time after time.

Again, a title such as "*Fantine-Margot*" needs editorial attention. Here the literary historical perspective already referred to enables one to set the poem in a context that adds much to the pleasure of reading it. The name is obviously evocative of . . . what? Well, it has been teased out some way and suggestions have been supplied, but none, of course, is to be found in *Horned Poppies* . . .

What we have in this volume, then, is a hotchpotch of readings from manuscripts and typescript, with many misreadings and several flights into the thin air of "creative writing" that come as bolts from the blue—or from some hitherto unknown source. The most striking—not by any means the only—creation of this kind is "Lewtchin". This is not a printing mistake, for the poem so titled uses the word four times in its stanzas. Does the editor (unnamed) have some hidden hoard from which to dredge up such a name? Otherwise, both manuscript and typescript read "Lewtelin". This reading was set up in print two or three years ago, and is therefore known to the publisher. Confidence is further shaken by the needless alteration of Powys's "chord" (already set up in print) to "cord" in this same poem. Unless some proof positive can be put forward for "Lewtchin", one has to say that "Lewtelin" is the right word in every sense. One must not mock, for the birth pangs must have been as the grasshopper heavy to bear.

Altogether *Horned Poppies* . . . is an odd performance that places yet another obstacle between the poems and their proper acknowledgment by their would-be readers. It may be asked how it comes about that a mere reviewer seems to be more familiar with the materials than the editor of the selection reviewed? Of that there may be a tale to tell . . . But here—perhaps—is no great matter.

Unluckily the eye is caught by the "*Publisher's Note*", in which the reader is told that "In addition to these poems [i.e. those that have been so far published in volume form] a number were published in magazines, and some in prose books by Powys and others, and these remain

uncollected for the present while magazine files and other possible sources are being examined". Some readers may recall that a few years ago sources of Powys's poems were openly asked for in the literary journals, among them the *Powys Review*. Response to that appeal was generous indeed, and is acknowledged with gratitude once again here.

The truth is that Powys's poems that were printed in magazines and in prose books by himself and others have already been systematically collected by examining "magazine files and other possible sources". It is of course possible and even likely that some fish escaped the net, and may still come to land. None the less, a selection of Powys's poems, the core of which was formed of pieces printed in periodicals and books of prose by Powys and others, was set up in print some two or three years ago, and since then has languished in the mists of Norfolk. That selection represented Powys's poetry from his first piece to almost his latest. From the core already referred to a few pieces were withheld for good reasons. The serious intention of the core then supplied was to start other like pieces from their hiding places and, by providing a little careful annotation, at the same time to make one deliberate and demonstrable step towards the publication of Powys's collected poems. Such publication might have been possible in, say, 1988. In the meantime further pieces might have come to light, and there would have been time to take advantage of corrections and constructive criticisms in the collected edition. Indeed corrections and adjustments have been made, but the selection, with its elucidating notes, has not been printed.

Once again the cause of John Cowper Powys's poetry suffers a set-back. The one selection with its accompanying materials is simply gathering dust, and as *Horned Poppies* . . . is so unreliable the barometer can hardly be said to be even as much as "set fair" for the near future. Not until the poetry is taken over and presented conscientiously and with conviction in a right context can one begin to hope that it will find its true level.

Since *Horned Poppies* . . . came out there has been yet another shift in proportion that draws the mind back to the whole sorry business of the present perspective and scale of values, and to realization of something that has been for ever spoiled. The earlier selection of some years ago referred to in these notes bears the dedication: "For John Cowper Powys's/First God-daughter/Lucy Amelia/This for Remem-

brance/In All Love and Affection''. The whole selection was made as a present for offering to one who always deeply enjoyed her brother's poetry. Lucy Penny, the youngest child of Mary and Francis Powys, died in her 96th year on the

7th November 1986. Well—the pity of it . . . here's rosemary . . .

BERNARD JONES

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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BARBARA DENNIS lectures in English at Saint David's University College, Lampeter. She has published articles on Charlotte M. Yonge and other Victorians, and is co-editor of *Reform and Intellectual Debate in Victorian England 1830-1880*, to be published later this year by Croom Helm.

T. J. DIFFEY is a Reader in Philosophy at the University of Sussex. He is the editor of *The British Journal of Aesthetics* and has published articles in, among other periodicals, the *British Journal*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *Ratio*. He is the author of *Tolstoy's 'What is Art?'* (Croom Helm, 1985).

ALYSE GREGORY (1884-1967), American novelist, essayist, managing editor of *The Dial*, 1920-25, married Llewelyn Powys in 1924 and moved to Britain. Her novels are *She Shall Have Music*, *King Log* and *Lady Lea* and *Hester Craddock*; an early autobiography is called *The Day is Gone* and a collection of essays, *Wheels on Gravel*.

JEREMY HOOKER formerly lectured in English at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and currently lives and works in the Netherlands. His critical writings include *John Cowper Powys* (University of Wales Press, 1973), *David Jones* and *John Cowper Powys* and *David Jones* (Enitharmon, 1975; 1978) and *The Poetry of Place* (Carcenet, 1982). His volumes of poetry include *The Elements* (Christopher Davies, 1972), *Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant* (Enitharmon, 1974), *Solent Shore* (Carcenet, 1978), *Landscape of the Daylight Moon* (Enitharmon, 1978), *Englishman's Road* (Carcenet, 1980) and *Selected Poems* (1982).

IAN HUGHES lectures in English at the Normal College, Bangor. He has recently edited the uncut version of J. C. Powys's *Maiden Castle* for publication. He has published poems in a small volume, *Slate* (Arfon, 1977) and in *Poetry Wales*.

ARLENE M. JACKSON is a Professor of English at St Joseph's University, Philadelphia. She is the author of *Illustration and the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Macmillan, 1982) and critical articles on Hardy, Melville, George Eliot, Anne Brontë and Dickens. She has recently completed for publication a work combining

photography with selections from Hardy's poems, and is currently researching the relationships between Victorian literature and photography.

BERNARD JONES, presently Fellow, University of Southampton, is editor of *The Poems of William Barnes* (1962), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Glyn Hughes* (1970) and *Romer Mowl and Other Stories by John Cowper Powys* (1974). He has also published numerous articles on nineteenth and twentieth-century writers.

ROBERT MINHINNICK has published four collections of poetry, the latest being *The Dinosaur Park* (1985). He has recently been manager of an environmental project on the Welsh coast and writer attached to two Rhymni comprehensive schools.

J. LAWRENCE MITCHELL is Professor of English, and Director of the Germanic Philology Program, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. His publications include *Computers in the Humanities*, ed. (Edinburgh U.P., 1974), *T. F. Powys* (University of Minnesota Libraries, 1983), *Some British Short Stories*, ed. (Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1985), as well as contributions to such journals as *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, *Scriptorium*, *PN Review*, and the *Canada Journal of Linguistics*. Recently back from a term of teaching in Beijing, he is currently working on a critical biographical study of T. F. Powys.

PAUL BENNETT MORGAN is on the staff of the National Library of Wales. His publications include articles on Vladimir Nabokov. He is currently researching Richard Hughes.

SUSAN RANDS wrote for *John O'London's Weekly* in the early 1950s and has recently returned to writing again, having in the meantime lived with her husband and children in Malaya and Germany and recently taken up farming near Glastonbury.

HELEN WILCOX lectures in English at the University of Liverpool, specializing in seventeenth-century literature. She is editor of the forthcoming Herbert volume in the Longmans Annotated English Poets series.

MARGARET WOOLF recently retired from the University of Winnipeg in order to write full-time. She has just completed a full-length study of the novels of E. M. Forster, and is working on the rhetorical structure of Shakespeare's tragedies. Her articles have been published in *Midcontinental and Writers' News Manitoba*. She reviews regularly for *Prairie Fire*, and is a member of the editorial board of *Wordloom*.

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 annual membership subscription is £7.50 (U.K.) and £10.00 (abroad).

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