

Margaret Jones illustration: Culhwch sets out to win Olwen, daughter of the King of the Giants.



# The Powys Review

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# Robin L. Wood

## John Cowper Powys's Welsh Mythology: Gods and Manias

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John Cowper Powys deeply believed that “any imaginative illusion by which a person half lives, any mythology in which a person half believes, is truer . . . than the most authenticated scientific facts.”<sup>1</sup> The superiority of the imagination is asserted over reason, and the inner, subjective world of the mind and belief over the external and apparently objective world of fact. Powys is at one with fellow Romantic mythologists such as Blake and Yeats, along with many other men and women this century and last, who have stressed that mankind, in following the scientific, objective path of rationalism, has become one-sided. In his early but important philosophic work, *The Complex Vision*, Powys lists the ten faculties in addition to reason that he felt were vital in the quest for Truth: “self-consciousness, will, the aesthetic sense, or ‘taste’, imagination, memory, conscience, sensation, instinct, intuition, and emotion.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover he comments that,

By the use of this fuller, richer, more living, more concrete instrument of research [that is the complex vision], the conclusions we arrive at will have in them more of the magic of Nature, and will be closer to the actual palpable organic mystery of Life, than either the abstract conclusions of metaphysics or the cautious, impersonal hypotheses of experimental physical science.<sup>3</sup>

Powys rejects the twentieth century's materialistic ideologies, like rationalism, capitalism, Marxism, or socialism,<sup>4</sup> but recognizes that there can be no return to a traditional religious faith. Yet there is a link between Powys's concern with mythology and traditional faith, for he comments:

The old religious faith gave our forefathers the stoical habit of drawing their life-energy not from external conditions but from within.



Margaret Jones illustration: Culhwch confronts Ysbathaden King of Giants and asks for Olwen, his daughter, as wife. (See Review, *The Quest for Olwen*).

That they called this power, welling up from inside themselves by the name of ‘God’ had an historical justification which is lacking today. But *that* is no reason for deserting the living well-spring of mysterious magic within us. Never mind the name! The point is that we *have* the power of re-creating the universe from the depths of ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

Powys's use of the word ‘mythology’ is a very personal one, as his choice of the words “illusion”, “half lives”, and “half believes” clearly indicates. He does not use ‘mythology’ in the current sense of fable or lie; nor is his approach that of traditional religious belief, where a person receives

myth as revealed truth. For Powys, 'mythology' is the ideas and values by which a person lives. It is created by an individual and is primarily personal and private rather than collective and social, and unlike 'ideology' does not carry any connotations of rigidity. Central to Powys's concept of mythology is the importance of the individual mind's creative powers: "Real reality is entirely of the mind . . . it holds the *lower reality*—that merely plastic agglomeration of matter and material force—in subjection."<sup>6</sup> Powys rejected the various received mythologies or ideologies of Victorian England, including science and Christianity, and "set to work" even at a young age, "bit by bit, fragment by fragment, to invent a mythology".<sup>7</sup> Not out of thin air of course; as he grew older the great literary, religious and philosophic classics of the past, amongst other things, were of great importance in shaping this personal mythology.

He only "half believes" and "half lives" his mythology because he approaches it just as a child approaches play: "[the child] almost believes he actually is such and such a thing, without, however, wholly losing consciousness of 'ordinary reality'."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, to understand Powys's mythologising one has to appreciate the importance of play-acting in his approach to life:

I have always been an actor in ideas—a charlatan if you will—and I am prepared to justify it; for is not Nature herself the nursing mother of all Mimes and Mummers, of all Pierrots, Petrushkas, and PUNCHINELLOS? The truth is that the majority of our cautious, objective-minded 'truth-seekers' are really unconscious hypocrites of the deepest dye. Rogues too they are. Half their *real* feelings they seek craftily to suppress, in order to present a grave fact of stolid common sense to the mad freakishness of real reality.<sup>9</sup>

What Powys is implying is that all men are actors in life. The quality of their acting depends, however, on the quality of their philosophy or mythology, and on their recognition of their 'role' or 'part', and therefore their place or identity, in life. Play-acting for Powys is not a frivolous,

immature activity—if conducted with the right understanding—but central to life: "for what are the great dramatic philosophies themselves—Plato's, Spinoza's, Schopenhauer's, Nietzsche's, Spengler's—but gestures of the play-acting ego as it gathers up within itself its most exciting life-illusions, to heighten the intensity of its normal life-experience?"<sup>10</sup> Powys's charlatanism has always readily produced contempt and irritation, even from those close to him, but in it he felt he had found a profound psychological truth: "Personally for myself, I would define this vein of 'charlatanism' in me which you are so afraid of as the clown-element, or the comic-actor element, *in the essence of all psychic truth* . . . the perilous drop of the aboriginal berry-juice of old Saturn's blood."<sup>11</sup>

Among those imaginative illusions especially important to Powys are those that developed from his interest in Wales and Welsh mythology. It is, however, important to distinguish between the Welsh mythological tradition and *Powys's Welsh mythology*, which is his personal "life illusion" which arises from his interest in Wales and in all things Welsh. Of course, strictly speaking a systematic Welsh mythology does not exist in the same sense as Greek, Roman, Norse, or even Irish mythology. All that remains are fragments found in the small amount of ancient Welsh literature that has survived, most notably *The Mabinogion*, *The Triads*, *The Gododdin*, and the poems attributed to Taliesin and Myrddin, in which it has been suggested remnants of an ancient mythology can be found. In addition there is the considerably larger body of Arthurian literature, which some scholars suggest had its origin in Welsh culture. What I have called Powys's Welsh mythology includes his interpretation of these remnants but goes far beyond them, as following in the steps of various scholars, especially Sir John Rhys, he attempts to re-create the lost mythology, a life-illusion, which includes in addition to his idiosyncratic use of Welsh myth, his attitude to Wales and the Welsh, their language, history, literature, and landscape.

Powys in his creation of a personal mythology is struggling with a central problem of the modern world: the decay of traditional mythology, faith, and belief, and the rise of scientific rationalism. Underlying this creative endeavour by Powys is the belief that the quality of each individual life is related to the quality of both the mythology of each individual and the collective mythology of a civilization, and that the imagination as much as rational thought and science should be shaping the future of mankind. However it must be emphasized that this mythological approach to life is as equally important in *Wolf Solent* as in those works full of allusions to Wales and Welsh mythology, such as *Porius*.

Powys's concern with re-creating the ancient Welsh mythology arose because he believed that the modern Welsh, especially those living in the remote mountainous areas, are the survivors of a once great civilization, whom he calls the Welsh aborigines. But what sense are we to make of such an idea, and Powys's obsession with mythology? Is this not perhaps just another example of what Philip Rahv calls mythomania?

Some [exponents of myth] have turned into sheer enthusiasts who blow up myth into a universal panacea, proclaiming that the 're-integration of myth' will not only save the arts but will lead to no less than the cure of modern ills and ultimate salvation.<sup>12</sup>

Rahv argues that "both art and metaphysics are among those superior forces which culture brought to bear in its effort to surmount the primitivism of myth", and agrees with Cassirer that "the world of human culture . . . could not arise until the darkness of myth was fought and overcome".<sup>13</sup> In a general sense, Powys could be described as part of twentieth century mythomania, and his interest in ancient peoples and beliefs identifies him with the primitivist tradition. On the other hand Powys does not reject reason, only the idolatrous worship of this one faculty, and deeply values the intellectual inheritance of both the East and West. His interest in mythology does not indicate a

naive wish to return to an earlier, simpler and more primitive culture, but rather his belief that, like it or not, mythology, in some form or another is inherent in human consciousness and perception.

In a way of course Rahv and Powys are referring to quite different things. For Rahv myth and mythology represents an early, primitive way of perceiving reality, a darkness that can only cloud modern man's intellect, whereas Powys's mythology, while on the surface seeming the same, because of the way he extols the Welsh aborigines and their forgotten wisdom, is in fact a product of the modern world, and ideas about the mind and the imagination and the way that we perceive the world, which have developed particularly since the Romantic period. There is nothing intellectually primitive about Powys's ideas on the mind and human psychology, and intellectually, as well as historically, he is the contemporary of Freud and Jung—though Powys has considerable suspicion of psychoanalysts and the scientific endeavours to chart the human mind.

Both the interest in mythologising and Wales can be traced to Powys's father, whose pride in the family's supposed Welsh ancestry led to "the ancestral Welsh dragon" being "painted in red and gold above the fire-place" in the family home at Montacute. Powys also notes in his autobiography that his "father's eyes used to burn with a fire . . . when he told us how we were descended from the ancient Welsh Princes of Powysland."<sup>14</sup> Powys Senior's interest in Wales was not antiquarian, nor historical, but rather "mythological", just as his interest in Nature was "mythological" rather than scientific: "part of his passionate—but totally subjective—romance of life".<sup>15</sup>

While Powys's interest in Welsh mythology does not seem to have taken a definite form until 1932 with the publication of *A Glastonbury Romance*, Powys had written, as Belinda Humfrey has shown, while still at Sherborne School—probably in 1888 or 1889—a story based on Welsh history titled

“Mordaunt Ap Gryfith. A tale”.<sup>16</sup> Also by 1898 he had already read the works that were going to have a major influence on the shaping of his mythology. In that year he was called upon to give a trial lecture for the Oxford University Extension authorities, and he notes that by “some occult destiny” the subject he was asked to speak upon was the Arthurian legend. For this lecture he bought only one book, Sir John Rhys’s *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*.<sup>17</sup> Other major sources for the lecture that are mentioned are Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* and Lady Charlotte Guest’s translation of *The Mabinogion*. Undoubtedly he was also influenced by the Celtic revival movement, and indeed records in the *Autobiography* his early admiration for W. B. Yeats,<sup>18</sup> whose essay “The Celtic Element in Literature” first appeared in 1897. Furthermore Powys must have been aware of Matthew Arnold’s *Lectures On the Study of Celtic Literature*, published in 1867. Further early interests in Wales and Welsh mythology are recorded in the *Autobiography* where Powys states that following the birth of his son in 1902 he “acquired a passion for everything Welsh,” “became besotted” with Welsh mythology and “bought Welsh grammar, Welsh dictionaries, Welsh modern poetry.”<sup>19</sup>

Although this “passion” did not take a noticeable form until some thirty years later there are intimations in earlier works. For example in *Wood and Stone* (1915) a major landmark, Leo Hill is linked with “Pre-Celtic times” and “aboriginal tribes”, though these references are not given a specifically Welsh context.<sup>20</sup> The druids are also associated with this hill.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore an important theme in this novel involves the idea of a struggle between “two opposed Mythologies—the one drawing its strength from the impulse to Power and the other from the impulse to Sacrifice”,<sup>22</sup> an early version of a major theme in Powys, that reoccurs in terms of the struggle of the aboriginal Welsh against the various invaders of Wales, and to a feud between two families of gods portrayed in *The Mabinogion*. This

dualistic theme is again important in Powys’s next novel *Rodmoor* (1916), but Welsh mythology is absent from both this work and his third novel *Ducdame* (1925), though in this work the otherworld, an important element in Powys’s Welsh mythology, makes its first appearance, albeit within a Greek mythological context with allusion to the Homeric Cimmerian land.<sup>23</sup>

In *Wolf Solent* (1929) Christie’s mother was Welsh and claimed descent from Merlin. Even so, though Wolf’s encounter with Christie’s “Merlinish mirror” involves a major crisis in his life, the brief Welsh allusions do not constitute a Welsh mythology, and within the novel—at least the cut, published version—there are no clues as to the mythological significance of Wales for Powys, although this novel is equally as mythological as any of the ‘Welsh’ novels.<sup>24</sup> Merlin assumes a more significant role in Powys’s next novel *A Glastonbury Romance*, the first novel in which Welsh mythology is important. Powys follows the theory that the Grail legend originated in pre-Christian Welsh mythology, and that the Welsh formerly had a major cult centre in the town of Glastonbury. As yet in 1932 Powys does not clearly distinguish the Celts from his aboriginal Welsh. Indeed the impression in *A Glastonbury Romance* is that the adjectives Cymric, Welsh and Celtic are interchangeable. Thus the “mysterious ‘corpse-God’ . . . in the old Cymric mythology” is also described as both Welsh and Celtic in the following passage:

The sturdy northeastern invaders . . . beat back more than Mr. Evans’ people [the Welsh] when they swept the Celts into South Wales. They beat back with them their thaumaturgic demigods, the Living Corpse, for instance, of Uther Pendragon.<sup>25</sup>

However, although the Welsh aboriginals are not directly introduced, there are a number of references to the idea that the Grail originated with the pre-Celtic inhabitants of Glastonbury.<sup>26</sup>

In his next novel, *Weymouth Sands* Welsh mythology is only an incidental detail

found in the name of the physician Dr Mabon, for "In the *Mabinogion*. Mabon is son of Modron, which means mother or The Mother".<sup>27</sup> Given this identification of Dr Mabon with the Son of the Great Mother, it is however not unreasonable to identify the "completely new set of values" Magnus Muir believes Dr Mabon is "destined to bring . . . into Weymouth",<sup>28</sup> with Powys's Welsh aboriginal wisdom, as this is a system of beliefs which involves, as *A Glastonbury Romance* and the later Welsh novels reveal, the worship of the Great Mother, a wisdom that stands in direct opposition to that of the vivisectionist and psychoanalyst, Dr Brush.

The idea of a purely heathen pre-Christian Welsh mythology assumes a dominant position for the first time in *Maiden Castle*. There is clear reference to the Welsh aboriginals with the suggestion that the name of the dark divinity, Uryen, was not a "Celtic word", but a word belonging to a mysterious, non-Aryan civilization, "a civilization possessed of secrets of life that Aryan science has destroyed".<sup>29</sup>

Powys's readings, particularly of Sir J. A. Frazer, Sir John Rhys, R. S. Loomis, and Jessie L. Weston, led him in his attempted re-creation of ancient Welsh mythology to stress three main elements. The first element is the idea of the Otherworld—or Overworld, Underworld—called variously *Caer Sidi*, *Annwn*, *yr Echwyd* (the Twilight). Secondly, there is the Mother goddess, a goddess of both Life and Death, who has various names: *Ceridwen*, *Nineue* (Vivian), *Cordelia* or *Creiddylad*, *Morgan le Fay*, and the *Grail Messenger*. Thirdly, there are various male gods who can be identified finally with the "deus mortuus" or "dark divinity" as Rhys describes him, Lord of the Otherworld, son and husband of the Mother goddess. In connection with this deity a somewhat bewildering variety of names is used by Powys: *Merlin* (*Myrddin*), *Gweir*, *Pryderi*, *Gwyn-ap-Nud*, *Uryen*, *Bran* and finally the *Maimed* or *Fisher King*.<sup>30</sup> Both male and female deities in Powys's Welsh mythology are ambiguous figures who are linked with both Life and Death, and who

therefore stand in contrast with the dualism of traditional Christianity, where Christ is the god of Life and Satan the god of Death. Although *Annwn*, the Otherworld, is also described as an Underworld ruled over by the dark divinity and as "the land of twilight and death", it is a place of bliss. The Otherworld is where the souls of the dead go, but it is also possible for the soul of a living person to visit it, though the implications are that it has first to pass through Hell, or undergo some form of suffering.<sup>31</sup>

In *Maiden Castle* Enoch Quirm believes himself to be a reincarnation of the dark divinity Uryen, whilst the novel's major character *Dud No-Man* is the son of *Cordelia* (on the mythological plane, the Great Mother) and has a personal mythology or life illusion about the Welsh Questing Beast, called in *Maiden Castle* *Dor Marth*.

But what have such characters as *Dud No-Man* and *Enoch Quirm* and their strange obsessions or manias to do with any profound lost wisdom and the idea of the superiority of the imagination and mythology over the scientific rationalism and the materialism of our age? *Enoch Quirm's* death might be seen as resulting from his pathetic failure to cope with reality, and as the natural conclusion for one of his morbid nature. Similarly for *Dud No-Man* the end of the novel deals with his failure, both as a writer and with the women in his life. *Dud's* inability to cope with life is illustrated by his incapacity to consummate his marriage with *Mona* and the sterility of his "amorous perversity" with her "spiritual substitute", in the ten years following her death. His relationship with *Wizzie* is equally cerebral and sterile.

However, *Enoch Quirm's* rejection of the names given him by his adoptive father, and his choice of the name *Uryen*, are not quite as senseless or insane as they appear on the surface, because they relate to his search for a personal identity. In some societies, "At puberty a boy receives a new name . . . has been reborn as a man, the reincarnation of one of his ancestors."<sup>32</sup> Thus he is drawn to Welsh mythology because, as his father adopted him from a Welsh tramp, *Enoch*

believes his ancestors were Welsh. The adoption of the new name initiates his quest for the beliefs of his ancestors. Everyone has the need for a coherent system of beliefs or values, a religion or mythology, if he is to make sense of the world and find his place in it. Enoch Quirm's madness lies in his rejection of the normal, accepted mythologies of our Western culture, and his identification with an obscure deity of the aboriginal Welsh, rather than with Christ or Marx, or another approved twentieth century system of beliefs.

Dud No-Man's name carries even more symbolic implications, representing both his rejection of his step-father's name, and directly describing his sexual impotence. Dud's name, because he chose it for himself (as his father chose the name Uryen) can be seen both as a reflection of his failure to achieve an identity, or satisfactory role within the culture into which he was born, and also as a defiant rejection of its values, and therefore part of a strategy to preserve his identity.<sup>33</sup> However, within the mythological dimension Dud does have a definite identity because his mother Cordelia had wanted him to be called Uryen.

Like his step-father he is to be identified, if unwillingly, with the maimed or impotent corpse god, who is also the Fisher King of the Grail Legend.<sup>34</sup> Whereas in terms of the normal values of our culture Dud is failure, his impotence reflecting his alienation from society and his failure to achieve a normal social role, the mythological identification is concerned with a completely different framework of values. Indeed it suggests that Dud is involved in the Grail quest. In becoming the dark divinity, the corpse god, the maimed, or Fisher King, Dud is partaking in a dangerous initiation involving spiritual death and rebirth. The implications are that he has stumbled on these Welsh mysteries through his relationship on the one hand with the "spiritual substitute" for his dead wife Mona, and on the other hand his mother, whose name Cordelia identifies her mythologically with the Great Mother.<sup>35</sup> The Great Mother is goddess of both Life

and Death. Dud's impotence can be viewed as a captivity at the hands of the goddess Death, the devourer of her own child, but also as a stage in his initiation into a fuller life. (It is of course a fundamental idea in many religions that the spiritual disciple will gain contact with some higher spiritual reality, or God, if he subdues his sexual impulses and becomes celibate).

Enoch Quirm's identification with Uryen in his Otherworld quest goes much further than just assuming the god's name: "Mr Quirm's eyes were dull, lifeless, colourless, opaque . . . [the] dominant impression . . . was of a half-vitalized corpse . . . a semi-mortuus."<sup>36</sup> Just as a Christian attempts to be like Christ, so Enoch Quirm is attempting a total identification with Uryen in order to regain the Golden Age wisdom of those people who worshipped Uryen and Ceridwen. Enoch Quirm is also identified with other figure from Welsh mythology, Bran. When he makes Dud touch the scars on his chest he says, "'What you've just touched is the Crow, Bran, the Crow. I suppose you've never heard of Bendigeitfran, or Bran the Blessed?'"<sup>37</sup>

Both father and son fail in their quest for the Welsh aboriginal wisdom, yet for Powys the fact that they pursued this quest is important, not the failure. Enoch Quirm's craziness lies not in the identification with Uryen, because for Powys there is spiritual magic in such apparent foolishness, but in the way he reveals his madness to the world, for "we must fight *to keep our madness concealed*."<sup>38</sup> Enoch Quirm's death follows the publication of his ideas in a newspaper.<sup>39</sup>

In many of his novels Powys deliberately chose characters who do not fit the so-called norms of society. Powys's anti-heroes at the fringe of society recognize alternative values and are questers for these values. In fact Powys's Welsh aboriginal quest has close resemblances to the heroic medieval quest for the Grail. The refusal to reject an obsession or mania in face of the hostility of society is seen by Powys as the heroic deed.

But is the mingling of ancient myth and

twentieth century setting in *Maiden Castle* successful? Does Powys speak confusedly and obscurely, even with the help of Professor Rhys, or are T. S. Eliot's comments on Blake equally applicable to Powys?

What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet . . . The concentration resulting from a framework of mythology and theology and philosophy is one of the reasons why Dante is a classic, and Blake only a poet of genius.<sup>40</sup>

In his use of Grail, Arthurian and Christian material in *A Glastonbury Romance* Powys is using a "framework of accepted and traditional ideas", and while Sir John Rhys's *The Arthurian Legend* is the main source of Powys's mythological ideas, in both *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Maiden Castle*, the mythology created around Dor Marth, Uryen and Cordelia in *Maiden Castle* has a more personal, less universal quality to it, even though connections do exist with the world of the Grail legend. The struggles of characters to create a personal Welsh mythology, perhaps too closely reflect the author's own. There is a less successful, more self-conscious, mingling of mythological names and human characters in *Maiden Castle* than in *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*. In *Owen Glendower*, set at the end of the fourteenth century, the reader more readily accepts that Welsh mythology can be part of the every day consciousness of characters, and that Rhisiart will make comparisons between Glendower and figures from Welsh mythology. Likewise in *Porius*, set in the Dark Ages, it is perfectly acceptable to have characters named Myrddin and Taliesin.

From the use of mythological names in *Maiden Castle* Powys's Welsh mythology evolves further in his next novel *Morwyn*, the first novel where actual figures from Welsh mythology, Merlin and Taliesin, are directly portrayed. This is the third of the five novels in which Welsh mythology is

important, though it is a lesser work, lacking the imaginative depth of the other four. However, *Morwyn* is very valuable for the light it throws on Powys's ideas. What especially is implied in this novel is that on the spiritual and psychological level a descent has to be made into Hell, or to use other mythological terms, a Waste Land Journey has to be made, to re-discover the aboriginal Welsh wisdom, for "Hell . . . may be made a hiding place for the highest".<sup>41</sup> This involves an inward journey and confrontation with evil.

Powys's next two novels, *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* mark the final stage in the evolution of his Welsh mythology, where for the first time he uses both Welsh subjects and settings in addition to Welsh mythology (the Welsh landscape is only an incidental detail in *Morwyn*, the first of Powys's novels written entirely in Wales).

*Owen Glendower* is full of allusions to *The Mabinogion*, and the basic structure of this novel is shaped not only by the recorded history surrounding Glendower's rebellion, but by the mythology of this great Welsh classic. Powys was especially influenced by the idea that the oldest part of it, "The Four Branches of The Mabinogi", concerns a struggle between two families of gods: northern gods who are associated with "stormy passions and violent deeds, interludes of timeless bliss and tragic deaths", and the southern gods who have "to counter with submission, self-restraint and patient persistence the antagonism of the mysterious powers of Annwfn, on the one hand, and of villein craftsmen on the other".<sup>42</sup> Powys identifies with the southern gods' Welsh aboriginal values of "submission, self-restraint and patient persistence", whose representative Pryderi, son of Pwyll, is defeated at the end of "The Four Branches" by the northern magician, Gwydion son of Don.<sup>43</sup> Powys's divergence from the accepted historical view of Owen Glendower, against which both Roland Mathias and Jeremy Hooker have raised strong objections,<sup>44</sup> arises because of this interpretation of Welsh history in terms of

the Welsh aboriginals. It is rather interesting to find that Powys himself in the essay "Welsh Aboriginal", first published in 1953, three years after *Owen Glendower*, describes Glendower as a "Normanized Celt", and contrasts him with the aboriginal Welsh:

Owen Glyn Dwr . . . that great Normanized Celt, for whom we Aborigines shed so much blood, married off nearly all his large brood among the Celtic-Norman Barons of the Border. But we *Real Welsh* have for some little matter of ten thousand years inter-married solely and purely among ourselves.<sup>45</sup>

Glendower is not presented as the traditional heroic leader of an oppressed people, but rather as a man who eventually turns from the battlefield, to free himself from the cruel, warlike, Celtic side of his nature, and so discover his true pacific, aboriginal Welsh Self.<sup>46</sup> Glendower is involved in an identification with the dark divinity, the ruler of Annwn, as are Enoch Quirm and Powys's other questers after the Grail wisdom of the Welsh.<sup>47</sup>

Like Powys himself Glendower is an enthusiastic student of ancient Welsh literature: "[Owen] could see . . . the most precious of all his books . . . It contained poems and prophecies reputed to have been uttered by Taliesin, Llywarch Hen, and others—one or two claiming to be from the actual mouth of Merlin himself!"<sup>49</sup> As the novel progresses Glendower becomes more aware of the Welsh side of his identity and of the Welsh aboriginal wisdom, an awareness that parallels Powys's own experience. Glendower's retreat and disappearance at the end of the novel is a symbolic gesture recalling the Welsh to their ancient ways. He asks: "Why shouldn't we be the one single race along with the Jews, of course!—who *win by losing*?"<sup>49</sup> Just as on the symbolic plane at the end of the novel Glendower moves inward, into the secret cave and into Annwn, so on the psychological plane he talks of the power he has found "by sinking inward": "If, by sinking into Glyndyfrdwy and Dyffryn Clwyd and into all the land of Edeyrnion, I increase rather than lessen

my power, why shouldn't the whole race of Welshmen increase its power by sinking inwards, rather than by winning external victories?"<sup>50</sup>

*Porius*, Powys's next novel, marks the culmination of the development of his Welsh mythology, and also the completion of the sequence of major novels that begins with *Wolf Solent*. Powys sets this novel in A.D. 499, during a historical period of transition, which like the time of Owen Glendower's rebellion, he felt resembled the mid-twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> He was also undoubtedly attracted to this period because it is one about which little is known and during which the historical prototypes for King Arthur, Merlin (Myrddin), Nineue (Vivian) and Taliesin could have lived. Therefore Powys is able to portray mythological figures directly, something that he had done only once before, in *Morwyn*.

Because they are historical figures in *Porius* unlike *Morwyn*, Powys's mythological thinking, particularly his ideas on the relationship between myth and history is presented in a new perspective. This new situation is further emphasised by, firstly, the presence of the Henog, who is both the biographer of Myrddin and author of *The Mabinogion*,<sup>52</sup> and secondly the presence of Uryen, Lord of Yr Echwyd who appears in this novel not as a dark divinity but as a contemporary nobleman whom Taliesin the poet "[has turned] in his imaginative hero-worship . . . into a sort of demigod".<sup>53</sup> This is the same Uryen who has such a powerful influence on Enoch Quirm in *Maiden Castle*. In getting to the source of myth Powys is not however simply reducing myth to history: Myrddin and Taliesin—and Nineue for that matter—are just as fabulous and mythological as the figures found in Malory. Nevertheless Powys's basic mythological framework remains consistent in *Porius* as in earlier works, because Myrddin is another embodiment of the *deus mortuus* or dark divinity.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that Uryen is a man and not a god in *Porius* does not however reduce Enoch Quirm's experience in *Maiden Castle* to the

level of a neurosis or mania. For Powys it is not gods or God that is the supreme creative force in the Universe but the human imagination: Powys has taken "Blake's hint . . . that the whole mythology of religion lies within the circle of the human soul".<sup>55</sup> Furthermore the original lord of Yr Echwyd is turned into a demi-god through the power of Taliesin's imagination. The imagination is to Powys a god-like creative force: it is a spiritual force active both within and outside the mind: "we have the power *over both mind and body* of a spiritual force in the depth of the soul that seems to come straight from a reservoir of *similar force* behind the whole astronomical world".<sup>56</sup> Knowledge of the power of the imagination is what Powys's shamans like Broch and Myrddin possess and that his various questers seek: this is the Grail; the goal of the Saturnian Quest; and the aboriginal Welsh wisdom. Just as the imagination—along with the other faculties of the "complex vision"—can uncover a higher reality, so mythology is the means through which this reality can be described. Within such a framework myth are not lies but the only valid means of describing the complex and necessarily subjective world of which we are a part.

It is worth further comparing the anti-heroic world of *Maiden Castle* with the heroic world of *Porius*. The very name Myrddin (Merlin) conjures up images of the heroic world of Arthurian romance. Myrddin is a prophet who actively opposes the values and beliefs of the Christian priest Minnawc Gorsant, whereas Enoch Quirm dies because he publishes his ideas in a newspaper article. Again Porius's ravishing of the giantess Creiddylad contrasts with the sterility and failure of Dud's relationships. However, as has already been argued Dud's failures arise because he lives in a rationalistic culture that is rejected by him and his step-father. Porius does not face this kind of problem in his period, where a great variety of beliefs and mythologies co-exist and where even miracles can occur. In fact both Rhisiart (in *Owen Glendower*) and Porius

have obsessions or manias equally as bizarre as Dud's and are engaged in a similar Welsh quest. Rhisiart's life illusion, for example, takes as its ultimate symbol the ancient fortress of Dinas Bran and the Welsh mythology associated with it: "Always vague but always dominant, the secret channel which his underlife had worked for itself had adopted Griffith ap Madoc's hill-fortress as the ultimate symbol of its direction".<sup>57</sup> Porius's deepest life illusion also involves aboriginals, though in his case it is not the ancestors of the modern Welsh, the forest people,<sup>58</sup> but the Cewri, or aboriginal giants. Porius's interest in the Cewri involves a search for personal identity that is similar to the searches of Dud No-Man, Enoch Quirm, Rhisiart and various other characters in Powys's novels.

However, the historical setting of these two Welsh novels, prior to the rise of modern science and rationalism, enables the reader to accept more readily the mythological dimension of these novels.

*Porius* marks the effective end of Powys's Welsh mythology and in his next novel *The Inmates* (1952) "Thibet" replaces Wales "as a source of occult wisdom".<sup>59</sup> In *Atlantis* (1954) there are again no Welsh allusions. However, while a number of allusions are found in *The Brazen Head* (1956) there is no mythological structure. Again though the Welsh god Mathonwy appears in *Up and Out* (1957), and the main characters were born in Wales, Powys is only using Welsh mythology as an incidental detail; which is also the case in *All or Nothing* (1960) despite the presence of the Druids.

In this process of laying bare the ideas and mythology used by Powys there is a danger that the human concern with suffering and happiness that underlies his works will be neglected. Behind his Welsh mythology there is a deeply felt vision of what the world could be. Thus Myrddin is not just a prophet, or shaman, but a voice for a profoundly human and meaningful philosophy of life.

It should be noted also that Powys's ideas are not narrowly racial or nationalistic.

Throughout his writings he constantly emphasises the spiritual achievements of mankind and his own profound debts to the great writers and philosophers of past ages. Furthermore the mythological concerns of the two major novels *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands*, in which Welsh mythology is of little importance, as well as all the other non-Welsh works, both fiction and non-fiction, are not intrinsically different from those in the works with a strong Welsh content.

Nonetheless, one of Powys's dominant

life illusions, at the height of his creative powers, from the early 1930s until around 1951, was that valuable clues to a profound, life-enriching wisdom could still be found, even in the mid-twentieth century, in the literature and culture of Wales. For Powys the human mind has a god-like capacity, and evil arises because men and women fail to develop that capacity fully: in not making use of all the tools of perception they do not discover "the living well-spring of mysterious magic within".<sup>60</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography*, London: Macdonald, 1967, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> John Cowper Powys, *The Complex Vision*, New York: Dodd, Mead, 1920, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxv.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to ignore a certain enthusiasm for socialist idealism in Powys's writings.

<sup>5</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 361.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, New York: Roy Publishers, 1950, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 136.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Rahv, *Literature and the Sixth Sense*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1969, pp. 202-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208. Quoting from Ernst Cassirer's, *Myth and Language*.

<sup>14</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 121, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> *The Powys Review*, No. 18 (1986), pp. 24-28.

<sup>17</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 284. *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891.

<sup>18</sup> *Vide Autobiography*, p. 224.

<sup>19</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 334-5.

<sup>20</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Wood and Stone*, New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1915, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Ducdame*, London: Grant Richards, 1925, pp. 264, 265, 209.

<sup>24</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent*, London: Macdonald, 1961, pp. 233, 238.

<sup>25</sup> John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance*, London: Macdonald, 1955, pp. 210 and 755.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 125, 175, 707, 1117, for example.

<sup>27</sup> Jeremy Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973, p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Weymouth Sands*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934, p. 504.

<sup>29</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle*, London: Macdonald, 1966, p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 260, 262.

<sup>31</sup> *Vide* Darrell Emmel, "Morwyn, The Harrowing of Hell", *The Powys Newsletter* 5 (1977-8), pp. 11-15. One of the most valuable sources of information on Powys's Welsh mythology is his collection of essays, *Obstinate Cymric*, Carmarthen: The Druid Press, 1947.

<sup>32</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, New York: Dover, 1953, pp. 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> Powys's allusion to Odysseus's encounter with the Cyclops (*Maiden Castle*, p. 18) is relevant to this discussion because Odysseus saves his life by telling the Cyclops that his name is No-man (Homer, *The Odyssey*, tr. E. V. Rieu, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945, pp. 151-52).

<sup>34</sup> *Vide, The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 314-8.

<sup>35</sup> The Welsh form of Cordelia is Creiddylad, daughter of Lludd in *The Mabinogion*, for whom Gwynn ap Nudd and Gwythyr mab Greidawl fight each other every first of May till Doomsday (*The Mabinogion*, tr. Lady Charlotte Guest, London: Dent, 1906, p. 310). Robert Graves describes Creiddylad as "an aspect of the White Goddess" (*The White Goddess*, London: Faber, 1961, p. 177). Cordelia is also identified as the Grail Messenger, another form of the Mother goddess and Ceridwen "the Welsh Demeter" is linked with the Grail Messenger (*A Glastonbury Romance*, pp. 800 and 491-2). Creiddylad is also of course the name applied by Porius to the young aboriginal giantess.

<sup>36</sup> *Maiden Castle*, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254. *Vide* also, p. 253.

<sup>38</sup> J. C. Powys, *In Spite Of*, London: Village Press, 1974, p. 133. See also p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> *Maiden Castle*, p. 482.

<sup>40</sup>T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, p. 162.

<sup>41</sup>J. C. Powys, *Morwyn*, London: Village Press, 1974, p. 178. *Vide fn.* 31.

<sup>42</sup>Alwyn and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1961, pp. 176-78.

<sup>43</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940, p. 563.

<sup>44</sup>*Vide* Roland Mathias, "The Sacrificial Prince", *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. Belinda Humfrey, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972, pp. 235-36; and Jeremy Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973, p. 77.

<sup>45</sup>*Obstinate Cymric*, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup>Self with a capital S, meaning the total personality, conscious and unconscious (as used by C. G. Jung, for example).

<sup>47</sup>"I'll be damned [says Rhisiart] if [Owen Glendower] doesn't look like Modry's Pryderi!" (*Owen Glendower*, p. 146). See *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, where Pryderi is identified with the maimed or Fisher King. Glendower is identified with Brân through Rhisiart's life illusion about Dinas Brân: "the Owen he saw that day took his place, easily naturally

. . . on the ramparts of Dinas Brân." *Owen Glendower*, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup>*Owen Glendower*, p. 389.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 914.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 914.

<sup>51</sup>See the "Argument" to *Owen Glendower*, pp x, xii, xvi, and *Porius*, p. xi.

<sup>52</sup>*Powys Newsletter*, 4 (1974-5), p. 18, which quotes from Powys's manuscript "The Characters of the Book".

<sup>53</sup>*Porius*, p. 409.

<sup>54</sup>"Myrddin Wyllt resembled a *deus mortuus*, or corpse-god" (*Porius*, p. 115).

<sup>55</sup>John Cowper Powys, *The Pleasures of Literature*, London: Cassell, 1946, p. 205.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>57</sup>*Owen Glendower*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup>A Neolithic, Iberian race, originally from Africa, who are however degenerate in comparison with that great lost civilization of Mathrafal, alluded to in *Owen Glendower*.

<sup>59</sup>G. Wilson Knight, *Saturnian Quest*, London: Methuen, 1964, p. 82.

<sup>60</sup>*Autobiography*, p. 361. *Vide fn.* 5.

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# W. J. Keith

## The Archaeological Background to *Maiden Castle*

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The dust-jacket for the first (American) edition of this novel, published by Simon and Schuster in 1936, claimed that “John Cowper Powys has put into MAIDEN CASTLE the results of extensive historical and archaeological study.” Neither the origin of nor the authority for this statement is clear. I know of no firm evidence about the books he consulted, though I shall be making some (I hope) plausible suggestions in the course of this paper. But first it is necessary to show how the composition of *Maiden Castle* proceeded concurrently with the most systematic excavation ever undertaken of the earthwork that gives the book its title.

Powys made what he called “a rough tentative beginning of a new story”<sup>1</sup> on 11 August 1934 while living at Rat’s Barn, East Chaldon. He had returned from the United States in June of that year, and must have been stirred immediately on his arrival by the excitement and publicity of the excavations which began that summer and continued until 1937. However, this initial attempt, which according to Ian Hughes has “but little textual relevance to the completed novel”,<sup>2</sup> proved abortive. In early October Powys moved to Dorchester itself and was immediately commissioned by his American publishers to write *The Art of Happiness*. When that was complete, he returned to the writing of fiction in late January 1935, determined to make “a completely fresh start” (Elwin, 7) with the setting firmly rooted in Dorchester. Almost exactly a year later, on 23 January 1936, he finished the original draft of the book at Corwen, where he had moved in the previous July. He completed the revision, Malcolm Elwin tells us (8), on 18 June. The American edition

appeared later that year, and the English in February 1937.

The excavations at Maiden Castle, which are at the centre of a central chapter in the novel, were conducted under the direction of R. E. M. Wheeler, who was later knighted and as Sir Mortimer Wheeler became one of Britain’s best known and most respected archaeologists. His complete report did not appear until 1943, far too late for Powys’s purposes (the novel itself appeared before some of the crucial later discoveries had been made). While the excavations were in progress, however, Wheeler issued a series of interim reports that were originally contributed to the *Antiquities Journal* and duly reprinted in the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*. These reports represent the sum of knowledge gathered at the time that Powys was writing, though his own awareness of the new discoveries was presumably derived from newspaper items, personal conversation, and possible visits to the site.

It will be remembered that Powys’s novel contains not only two memorable scenes that take place within the ramparts of the earthwork, but various arguments between the characters concerning its date, its purpose, and the nature of the objects unearthed there. Enoch Quirm (alias “Uryen”) believes it to be the product of an ancient “mysterious people possessed of secrets of life that Aryan science has destroyed”;<sup>3</sup> Roger Cask (alias “Claudius”) considers it Roman; and Teucer Wye the Platonist, when viewing the excavated objects, is convinced that the female figure came from Greek Samothrace. How do these “interpretations” fit with the developing knowledge of 1934-6?

Wheeler begins his first report by summarizing the results of earlier archaeological activity: "Slight and ill-recorded excavations carried out intermittently by Edward Cunnington of Dorchester culminated in 1882 with the partial uncovering of a Roman building in the eastern part of the earthwork."<sup>4</sup> Coincidentally, this excavation had also been reflected in imaginative literature, since Cunnington is the original for the antiquary in Thomas Hardy's short story "A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork", first published in the *Detroit Post* in 1885, and subsequently reprinted in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in 1893, when the identification with Maiden Castle was made obvious by an editorial title, "Ancient Earthworks at Casterbridge", and by the inclusion of four photographs of the site. As I shall suggest later, Powys seems to have picked up a number of details from Hardy's story, which Wheeler was to describe elsewhere as a "burlesque account"<sup>5</sup> of Cunnington's excavations.

Before Wheeler's own excavations began, it was generally agreed among the more traditional archaeologists that a smaller Neolithic earthwork occupied part of the site but that the impressive contours that are familiar today were a much later Iron Age development. But Cunnington's Roman discovery, which he identified incorrectly as a "villa", had aroused interest and impressed the Roman association with the earthwork on the public consciousness. Hence Roger Cask's emphasis. On the other hand, a rival group of archaeologists maintained that the whole site was Neolithic; because it influenced Powys's general approach to the subject, I shall be discussing this group later.

Wheeler's excavations in the main confirmed the orthodox view, but greatly extended our knowledge of the earthwork's complex development through time. He showed that a modest Neolithic settlement had once existed (he originally dated it as between 2000 and 1500 B.C. though, in accordance with revised archaeological datings, he later extended that date back to c.3000 B.C. [Guidebook, 5]), but that the

site had then been abandoned. Apparently, adverse climatic conditions during the Bronze Age had discouraged permanent habitation on the southern downlands, though barrows for the dead were regularly raised on the hills. The Maiden Castle site was not repopulated until c.300 B.C. when the Neolithic fortifications were repaired, improved, and augmented. Still later, early in the first century B.C., the site was expanded to its fullest extent. Wheeler writes:

The implication seems to be that Maiden Castle passed suddenly at this time into the control of a relatively small group of western invaders, vigorous and soldierly in character, but with a comparatively limited following. . . . Why the nameless *tyrannus* who led these invaders found it necessary to devise the extravagant fortifications which now represent him is less easy to say: perhaps they may best be regarded as the gesture—theatrical to the point of megalomania—of a conqueror determined to assert himself unequivocally and overwhelmingly in his newly conquered kingdom. (1936, 6-7)

A century or so later (c. A.D. 20-43) Maiden Castle, along with other Wessex settlements, was brought "within the orbit of the loosely co-ordinated Belgic kingdoms" (1937, 13) and in the 1937 excavations (too late for Powys's novel) evidence of a bitterly fought battle with the Roman forces under Vespasian was unearthed. And later still, by the beginning of the fourth century, the Romans erected the building which Cunnington had mistaken for a villa but which Wheeler identified, in his first year of excavating, as "a temple of the usual 'Romano-Celtic' type" (1935, 6).

Let us now return to Powys's novel. The first references to excavations come in the third chapter where Roger Cask is canvassing financial support for the next series of digs. This is in line with an appeal for funds at the end of Wheeler's first interim report (1935, 17). Cask goes on to summarize the findings of the previous summer: "A metal plate with a rough figure of Minerva upon it was dug up in the foundations of that Roman temple" (164). Enoch Quirm, however,

goes on to speak of “*the other* votive image they dug up”, which “had nothing to do with Minerva or Rome either” (166). It was “a three-horned bull . . . with two human torsos impaled on its horns and another one transfixed on its up-curving tail” (167). Here Powys is telescoping two Maiden Castle discoveries separated by over fifty years. This is Wheeler’s account of them from his report on the 1934 excavations: “Cunnington [in 1882] found a fragment of a bronze statue and a ‘feathered’ bronze votive plaque bearing a figure of Minerva in repoussé. In 1934 a small votive bull of turned bronze with the three horns familiar on votive bulls from eastern Gaul, and surmounted by three human busts, one with the head missing, came to light” (1935, 7). Cask is sufficiently up to date, then, to know that Cunnington’s building is now identified as a temple, and would be pleased to know that Wheeler attributes both images to the Roman period.

Later in the novel, the excavations begun the previous year are continuing (excessively early by “realistic” standards) on Midsummer Eve, Sunday June 23—and it is worthwhile noting that, while Powys is not consistent on this matter throughout the novel, in this instance he is indeed following the 1935 calendar. Powys writes:

the unusually warm weather had stimulated the Archaeological Society engaged in the Maiden Castle excavations to begin their summer work earlier than was expected; and in the afternoon of Saturday the twenty-second the local *Echo* announced a momentous discovery.

From the wording of this announcement it appeared that in the oldest portion of the earthworks, in a place where digging had been undertaken for the first time, the remains of an extensive stone building had been discovered, of greater antiquity than the well-known Roman Temple . . . (333-4)

Intrigued by this announcement, the main characters in the book follow the crowds up to Maiden Castle on the Sunday afternoon to view the findings. Powys refers enigmatically to “the Great Discovery, as ‘It’—or

‘They’—rested there on that crude bench” (369), but we learn later that the finds consist of a “woman’s head”, a “headless torso”, and an “eyeless and earless beast-god” (383). As we might expect, the main characters argue energetically about their meaning and origins.

At this point, Powys’s “romance” has taken wings. There were no such discoveries in the actual excavations, and it seems as if he has merely let his imagination take off from the finds that he has already described. The “woman’s head” seems to have been suggested by Cunnington’s “figure of Minerva”, his “headless torso” by Wheeler’s human bust “with the head missing”, and the “eyeless and earless beast-god” by Wheeler’s “votive bull”.

So much for the immediate and local facts that set Powys’s imagination on one of its characteristic flights. But what of his more general archaeological knowledge? I have already mentioned the lack of any evidence about what books he consulted. We do, however, have an intriguing clue. In the essays collected together in *Obstinate Cymric* (1947), there are three allusions to a man referred to in one of the instances as “the learned Massingham”.<sup>6</sup> This is H. J. Massingham (1882-1952), who is best known as a knowledgeable writer on English rural life and culture. He was also, incidentally, a great friend and admirer of Llewelyn Powys, whom he visited on various occasions in the 1930s and to whom he refers regularly in his writings.

But Massingham had another, related interest. In the 1920s he became attached, in what appears to have been a somewhat “freelance” sort of way, to the “diffusionist” school of archaeology centred upon the work of G. Elliot Smith and W. J. Parry at the University of London. During this period he published a number of books about British prehistoric sites. For our purpose, the three most important are *In Praise of England* (1924), which contains a long chapter entitled “Maiden Castle”; *Downland Man* (1926), a lengthy study of British antiquities; and *The Heritage of Man*

(1929), which discusses some of the theoretical questions behind diffusionist theory.

The references to Massingham in *Obstinate Cymric*, of course, post-date *Maiden Castle* by a decade, but there are good reasons to suppose that Massingham's books were among those consulted by Powys during the composition of his novel. First of all, there are two references to *Maiden Castle* (the earthwork) in *Obstinate Cymric* (59, 73), and on both occasions Massingham is mentioned in the next sentence. This would seem to suggest that Powys associated the two in his mind. Second, Powys discusses within his text two aspects of Maiden Castle that may be considered controversial, and both of these are ardently championed by Massingham in books that were relatively up-to-date at the time that Powys was writing. A consideration of these two issues should bring us close to the centre of our subject.

The first concerns the age of the earthwork. In the prefatory "cast of characters" Enoch (Uryen) Quirm is described as desiring "to get into touch with the old gods of *Mai-Dun*, or 'Maiden Castle', the great neolithic earthwork near Dorchester" (13; the last phrase, by the way, was reproduced on the dust-jacket blurb of the 1966 MacDonald edition). Neolithic. Modern archaeologists could only accept that adjective with considerable qualification. As I have already indicated, it is now generally established that, while a neolithic settlement undoubtedly existed on this site, it was a comparatively modest affair and did not continue through the Bronze Age. Credit for what Wheeler calls "the first building of Maiden Castle properly so-called" (Guidebook, 8) must go to an Iron Age people of approximately 300 B.C. This town or fort (the terms are in dispute, and important to Powys as we shall see) was three times the size of the neolithic settlement. Later, in the first century B.C. the ramparts were dramatically extended to create the impressive contours we know today.

Massingham, however, believed otherwise. In his essay "Maiden Castle" he

writes: "If, therefore, Maiden Castle is not more or less contemporary with Avebury and the temple at Stanton Drew in the Mendips as it looks, and as I believe it to be, I hardly think that it is munching too large a slice off the backward of time and archaeological caution to fix conception and construction between the Avebury and Stonehenge periods".<sup>7</sup> In the modern archaeological time-scale, this means between 3000 and 2000 B.C.<sup>8</sup> Compare that with the following passage from *Maiden Castle* where Uryen tells Dud: "Mai-Dun was a civilized polis, long before the Romans came . . . 'You must remember, lad,' he said, 'we're talking of the civilization that built Stonehenge and Avebury. Why should the dwellers in Mai-Dun be regarded as wretched earth-burrowers, when their contemporaries could build such monuments!'" (239). Or Dud brooding upon the recently excavated objects: "They had been storing up in that long darkness all the wild prayers, all the desperate imprecations that had been addressed to them on the summit of Mai-Dun before the last stone had been added to Stonehenge" (383).

The second matter concerns the vexed question of the purpose of Maiden Castle and its ramparts. At one point Wizzie Ravelston remarks with some impatience to Jenny Dearth: "I've heard D. arguing with Mr. Quirm, till you'd have thought it was a matter of life and death, whether Maiden Castle was a town or a fort" (307). Well, it may not be a matter of life and death in our time, but it was a quite bitter controversy in archaeological circles during the early decades of the twentieth century, focusing on whether these prehistoric remains were fortified camps of a society embroiled in life-and-death warfare or the sites of peaceful pastoral tribes. This is a topic upon which Massingham is full of opinions and assertions. Thus *The Heritage of Man* contains a long section entitled "The Origins of War" and the essay on Maiden Castle in *In Praise of England* is subtitled "A Theory of Peace in Ancient Britain". Very briefly, the Diffusionists were in revolt against the

standard assumption that early prehistoric peoples were continually engaged in fighting and killing—what might be called the “nasty, brutish and short” syndrome. A camp (if it was a camp) of the size of Maiden Castle, they argued, was too vast to be adequately defended. All this lies behind the following passage in Powys’s novel:

“I wonder,” [Dud] said to himself, “whether it really *is* possible that if I’d come along this road ten thousand years ago I should now be gazing on the Cyclopean walls and towers and temples and parapets of a great, *peaceful* city of a far nobler civilization than ours, where war and torture and vivisection were unknown, where neither the pleasures of life were denied nor the paths to immortality discredited?” (230-231; second emphases mine)

Had Powys written his novel a few years later, the answer would have been clear—and negative. By the time Wheeler’s excavations were complete, it was impossible to believe in an early date for the earthwork as it exists today. Moreover, the “peaceful” theory of the present Maiden Castle was also demolished. As early as the 1934 excavations, a single pit containing 4000 slingstones was uncovered (1935, 5) and the number was considerably augmented as the digs proceeded. As Wheeler was later to note, the “‘cliff-castles’ of distinctive design, often with multiple ramparts”, of which Maiden Castle is a classic example, are now known “to have been conditioned by the extensive use of the sling” (Guidebook, 14). Apparent evidence of human sacrifice was also revealed on the site in 1936 (1937, 10), and close to the end of the excavations the dramatic story of “the battle at the East Gate” (Guidebook, 16) became clear as the evidence of Vespasian’s sacking of the fortress in A.D. 43-4 was uncovered. Skeletons with “many of the skulls deeply scored with sword cuts” (Guidebook, 18) tell an incontrovertible story.

Strictly speaking, that is the end of my topic, but I must insert a short *coda*.

Powys’s novel is, of course, as he always insisted, “a romance”. But it is more than

airy fancy, and it needs, as I have shown, to be read against the background of archaeological knowledge of its time. But does the “romance” side of the book, Uryen Quirm’s mystical theories about Maiden Castle, have origins outside Powys’s own volatile imagination? Here the evidence is decidedly more uncertain, but a few suggestions can be offered, with caution. I have already mentioned Thomas Hardy’s “A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork”. This short story begins with a description of a gale which “races in a straight line from the fort, as if breathed out of it hitherward”,<sup>9</sup> the last phrase being an astonishing anticipation of Powys’s (or, rather, Uryen’s) belief. This story is one of the few places where Hardy’s prose verges on the occult:

Acoustic perceptions multiply to-night. We can almost hear the stream of years that have borne those deeds away from us. Strange articulations seem to float on the air from that point, the gateway, where the animation in past times must frequently have concentrated itself at hours of coming and going, and general excitement. There arises an ineradicable fancy that they are human voices; if so, they must be the lingering air-borne vibrations of conversations uttered at least fifteen hundred years ago. (176)

In terms of archaeological theory, Hardy’s story is the opposite of Powys’s. The antiquary is intent on asserting that “it is not a Celtic stronghold exclusively, but also a Roman; the former people having probably contributed little more than the original framework which the latter took and adapted till it became the present imposing structure” (181). Hardy’s antiquary is as wrong about the ramparts on one extreme as Massingham and Powys’s Dud Noman are at the other. This is Roger Cask’s error rather than Uryen Quirm’s. More important, however, is the unexpected atmospheric similarity between Hardy’s story and Powys’s romance.

Other writers have also responded in extreme terms to the atmosphere of Maiden Castle. Here, for example is the reaction of F. J. Harvey Darton, another writer on

English country life, who died a few months before the publication of Powys's novel. In *The Marches of Wessex* (1922, published in the United States under the title *The Soul of Dorset*) Darton writes:

It is when you set out for Maiden Castle, and begin to draw near to that immense stronghold, that the spirit of things very far off, very powerful, falls upon you. There is no time of year, no condition of light and shade, when the vast ramparts do not call up awe and wonder . . . To this day it dominates and hypnotizes.

. . . Maiden Castle, at that magical distance, seemed a very citadel of evil wizards.<sup>10</sup>

Darton, too, is wildly inaccurate about its size and age—he calls it “the largest and finest Stone Age earthwork in the world”

(43) and it is neither, not even the largest Iron Age earthwork in England. Whether Powys had read this book I do not know; even if he hadn't, however, he might have remembered the phrase “a very citadel of evil wizards” from Massingham, who quotes it (*In Praise of England*, 154). All I am concerned to do here is to insist that Powys's novel arose out of a context that combined developing archaeological knowledge with wildly imaginative responses to the origins and purposes of prehistoric sites. *Maiden Castle*, as a novel, is not quite the idiosyncratic “sport” that, if we stick to the main paths of literature and fiction, we may assume. But it is, I would submit, all the more fascinating for its position within a local and national tradition. There, in a very real sense, it is a culmination.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Elwin, “Prefatory Note” to John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle*, London: MacDonald, 1966, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Hughes, “A Poor Ragged Maiden: The Textual History of *Maiden Castle*”, *Powys Review*, No. 12 (Spring 1983), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle* (1936), London: MacDonald, 1966, p. 254. All subsequent references in my text refer to this edition.

<sup>4</sup>R. E. M. Wheeler, “The Excavations of Maiden Castle, Dorset: First Interim Report”, *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*, 56 (1935), p. 2. Similar reports appeared in the next two volumes for 1936 and 1937. Quotations in my text will be distinguished by these years of publication, which are always one year following the excavations described.

<sup>5</sup>Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Maiden Castle*, Department of the Environment Official Guidebook. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1972, p. 19. Subsequent references in text as Guidebook.

<sup>6</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric*, Carmarthen, 1947 and London: Village Press, 1973, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup>H. J. Massingham, *In Praise of England*, London: Methuen, 1924, p. 195.

<sup>8</sup>I am indebted for comparative time-scales here to Jacquetta Hawkes, *The Atlas of Early Man*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Hardy, *A Changed Man* (1913), London: Macmillan, 1951, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup>F. J. Harvey Darton, *The Marches of Wessex*, London: Nisbet, 1922, pp. 41, 42.

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# Penny Smith

## Works Without Names:

### John Cowper Powys's Early, Unpublished Fiction (Part I)

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In his *Autobiography* Powys says it was at Court House near Offham in Sussex, where he lived from 1896 to 1902, that he began "to compose an interminable and totally unpublished story, a story in which I let myself go to the extreme limit." This "unpublishable Work without a Name" was, we are told, profane and obscene; Powys based his characters on his friends and although this work had an audience of only one—"The Catholic", John William Williams—its young author found the exercise both absorbing and therapeutic: it "eased [his] heart and more than [his] heart".<sup>1</sup>

Several years ago I thought I had located this "huge unprintable book" (*Autobiography*, p. 327) in the form of an unnamed, unfinished manuscript novel held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, at Austin.<sup>2</sup> This work has a fair amount of obscenity and profanity and could be labelled as pornographic, (though by today's standards it definitely rates as 'soft core'). In recent years, however, the National Library of Wales has quietly been building up a major collection of John Cowper Powys manuscripts, and amidst the diaries of some thirty years, the unpublished letters and poems and corrected typescripts, there are other early attempts at fiction which include pieces similar to the Texas manuscript and which suggest that the description in the *Autobiography* actually refers to a body of writing rather than to one work in particular.

The existence of such a large amount of unexplored manuscript material is very exciting, a challenge to the researcher: any critic who wants to trace Powys's development as a novelist needs to start here, and future biographers will also discover in these early texts invaluable insights into this

period of Powys's life. In my discussion of this fiction I will be highlighting the major points of interest for both critic and biographer; I should make it clear, however, that because we are talking about a very large volume of material—318 pages in the Texas manuscript, over 700 pages in the National Library of Wales archives—and because this is completely uncharted territory, I have had to ignore much of real interest. My aim is not to provide a last word but an opening foray; what is really needed is a full-length study of all Powys's early, unpublished fiction, and this would involve searching out other manuscripts,<sup>3</sup> the painstaking construction of a chronology, as well as a proper critical evaluation.

\* \* \*

Although the early texts are all closely related they do fall into two distinct groups; in one Powys constructs escapist fantasies in which he goes 'to the limit', while in the other he attempts to produce a more conventional novel. I am going to begin by concentrating on the latter group, those texts which have provisionally been labelled by the National Library of Wales as A1, A2, B and C.<sup>4</sup> I will also be referring to texts D and E and to some shorter sections of manuscript, as well as to the work held at Texas, but will leave discussion of this group's main themes to the second part of this article, to appear in a future number of *The Powys Review*.

Only one of all these texts, D, has any sort of conclusion—what is initially most striking about this early fiction is the amount of undirected, almost frenetic, energy involved. A work is begun, chapters are piled on each other, then the whole will suddenly

peter out into blank pages, doodles, new chapter plans, poems. A1 is kept up for four chapters and then the foolscap exercise book is reversed and A2, a variation with some new characters, some slightly altered names and situations, takes over. B is the most substantial of the texts and a close comparison of reworked passages suggests it does come after A1 and A2 as a second draft. C is very similar in theme although it is a disjointed, flimsier piece of writing and I am reluctant to hazard its exact place in the chronology. One thing that does seem certain, however, is that the A and B texts were written while Powys lived at Burpham, where he moved with his wife in 1902. In these texts there is a River Nura and a town with a castle, Nuradale. Burpham is near the River Arun and the castle town of Arundel, while the Godbarrow village church and Leper's Path of the fiction corresponds with the *Autobiography's* description of the Burpham Church and its Leper's Path (328).

In the *Autobiography* Powys says that in his "unpublishable" work his elderly friend, the poet "Mr. de . . .", (Alfred de Kantzow), appeared as Mr. de Woztnak, and John William Williams as Cousin Taxater (314). Both of these characters are prominent throughout these manuscripts, as is Hugh Bigod, who closely resembles the *Autobiography's* portrait of Powys's brother-in-law, Henry Lyon, while Powys's other friend, Dr Bernie O'Neill, appears variously as Dr O'Stein, O'Driscoll, O'Lear, and Christopher Touzeler. So—we have the setting, the friends: all that is needed is Powys himself; in this early fiction we witness the birth of the Powys-hero.

Coining that useful term, "Powys-hero", G. Wilson Knight identifies *Rodmoor's* Adrian Sorio as "the first of Powys's succession of obvious . . . self-reflections".<sup>5</sup> Up until now it has seemed there was a gradual development of this central figure, starting with the Powys-like James Anderson in *Wood and Stone* (1915). But in the earlier texts the Powys-hero is as prominent and recognizable as any of his published successors. Owen Glendower (A1, A2, B), Philip

Glendower (C), Philip Davenant (D), Philip Bleddyn (E), Philip Warton (Texas): the name changes, the age fluctuates from twenty-four to about thirty. The Powys-hero remains essentially the same character however, always a writer, always on the fringes of society, unconventional, a rebel, a free-thinker . . .

This thinly-fictionalized self-portrait usually makes his entrance as a solitary figure on the Downs, carrying the inevitable stick and stubbornly wearing a great-coat, in spite of the hot weather. A1 begins like this and, although the A, B and C texts do differ considerably, a brief summary of A1 gives a fair idea of the others as well. The first chapter of A1 is a long, very detailed, description of the Sussex Downs and the depiction of our as yet unnamed hero walking across them. Chapter two introduces us to three young sisters, Bess, Elspeth and Ray Runnymede, who live at Godbarrow Vicarage, and the third chapter begins with the young man from the Downs rowing a white boat down the River Nura. He lands and makes his way to Godbarrow Church where he rests in the churchyard and overhears a conversation between a cricket-obsessed curate and a young woman who is telling him about Elspeth's engagement to one Owen Glendower:

" . . . a journalist or poet or something of the kind—not a respectable man at all and indeed, as far as I could make out from what Elspeth told me in confidence, of very doubtful views on religious subjects."

The curate sees Owen in the churchyard, takes him for a tramp and kicks him.

In the fourth chapter our narrator decides:

The time has now arrived at which may be unfolded to the patient reader what manner of man he was who thus mysteriously wandered over lonely Downs and lingered in desolate Churchyards—what errand brought him and why he loitered and hesitated thus in pursuing it.

We are informed that Owen is the orphaned son of a Welsh landowner. Devoted to his

country's literature,<sup>6</sup> he has been employed by a scholarly society to research Celtic languages and has spent the past year in Brittany, translating mediaeval Welsh verse, preparing a volume of his own English poetry—and losing all interest in his fiancée. This romantic difficulty is the reason for the young scholar's pale loitering; and it is this unhappy engagement which is the central dilemma facing the Powys-hero in this group of texts.

In A1 Owen is concerned to discover just how much pain he will cause Elspeth by jilting her, and we are told that in this situation any onlooker would pity him more than her:

Elspeth as a matter of fact had never loved Glendower; it was not in her nature to love—But she was shrewd and far-sighted and she knew well enough that to a clergyman's daughter in a remote country village, young men with even small independent patrimonies do not often offer themselves—She saw also, though with an unsympathetic eye, that the youth had intellectual powers of no common order—might indeed one day become famous; and Elspeth, like many other shallow, worldly and narrow-minded people, had an overweening respect for intellectual Fame—(iv)

This is a harsher description than that in the second chapter, where she isn't depicted as unkind or cunning but just remorselessly conventional:

She had regular features, dark hair, and a gravely sedate cast of countenance—Everything about her was charged with the spirit of domesticity, practical efficiency and propriety—You could not imagine her saying or doing anything inappropriate or unconsidered—The Adequate was her Divinity, Common Sense her Moral System—She loved Order as many human beings love Pleasure, she loved Cleanliness as a few others love God.

Elspeth is aggressively normal and healthy, in sharp contrast to her elder sister, the tomboyish, tree-climbing Bess, and a world away from the younger Ray, a mysterious, sensitive girl who “might have been a child of Southern Deserts; fevered, passion-

ate and volatile.” (ii) In this contrast we have the basis for what will become a common pattern through Powys's novels, the Powys-hero torn between two very different types of women. The A1 text is dropped before this becomes explicit, but in A2 Owen's conventional fiancée, (who is now, rather confusingly, named Ray), has a rival in the half-Italian *Lacrima Colonna*.

*Lacrima* is an exciting new arrival in Greyhelmstone (Brighton). A young orphan, she feels attracted to Owen as soon as she hears about him, sensing in him someone like herself “trying to escape some intolerable subjection.” *Lacrima*'s lot is to be a paid companion to the neurotic Mrs Ford, and in personality as well as employment she is closer to Perdita Wane in *Weymouth Sands* (1934) than to the unhappy, fated, *Lacrima* of *Wood and Stone*. The B text is abandoned before *Lacrima* and Owen actually meet, but in A2 they do share some precious moments together. Owen saves the young Italian from the encroaching tide and rows her to safety:

*Lacrima*'s pale cheeks wet with tears and salt spray, her pale hands and white feet seemed like the embodiment of all that is weird and ominous in the sea—a wisp of sea weed bleached by the sun and blown to and fro by the wind, a broken shell tost up on the beach from depths of fathoms of water, a flake of white foam driven over sands—

Here *Lacrima* prefigures Christie from *Wolf Solent* (1929) and, like Wolf with Christie, Owen quickly recognises that she is extremely important to him. The sustained text soon breaks off, however, and this couple's fate is left undecided.

In this A2 version of things Ray is more pleasant than the original Elspeth, although still of a temperament antagonistic to Owen's. Owen too has undergone a change in that he is no longer of independent means but is dependent upon his sympathetic father, the Rector of Godbarrow Church, and his distinctly unsympathetic brother, the Reverend Constantine Glendower.

Owen's poetry will not earn enough to support a wife and Ray wants him to take up a career:

"... how often must I tell you," retorted the young man, "that I have no intention of sacrificing myself to what is called 'getting on'—The idea of a little suburban house with a neat servant at the door and a couple of flower beds gives me a hopeless feeling of dreariness—"

Ray herself realises she should be marrying the vicar, not the poet, but she is obsessed by this "tantalizing boy". What keeps them together is "the carnal primeval attraction", and Owen's desire not to hurt his father.

Owen's friends predict that the match will end in disaster and Hugh Bigod in particular is disgusted by what he sees as his friend's weakness: "'... he knows as well as I do that the restraints of marriage will be intolerable to him yet he is walking with open eyes into the net.'" Similarly, in the B text, Ray tells her reluctant fiancé that when they are married she would like to continue living near Godbarrow:

Owen Glendower looked as far as he could into the future of his life and it seemed to him that existence became ever narrower and narrower until almost contracted away into nonentity... he saw himself entangled in a web of soft domesticity—shut up, as it were, in a labyrinth of thornless roses—He saw with horrible, clarified distinctness the conventional world with which his marriage would surround him.

He sees all of this, he knows the horror it means, and yet he makes himself smile into her eyes and give an answer which is: "brief and final—"We will be married, my Ray, as soon as your Uncle gives us leave, and we will take the Barge Cottage by the river!" (B, iii)

"[T]his is me, my life, my happiness that is going to be thrown away—" (B, v) A cry made all the more poignant by our awareness that this was written in the early years of Powys's own highly unsuccessful marriage.

The young man visualizes an arid future but still endeavours to snatch at some hope: "'I do not see why I should give up my freedom...—Even though I am married. There are plenty of men who lead double lives.'" (B, v) The *Autobiography* and *Letters to Llewelyn*<sup>7</sup> make it clear that this is what Powys actually attempted, and although there are dangers in turning to fiction for biography there seems to be little doubt that here Powys was examining the history of his own predicament. Why he married Margaret Alice Lyon in 1896 has always been something of a mystery; she appears to have been a fairly conservative and conventional young woman, and in *The Brothers Powys*, Richard Perceval Graves cites the family story that on the night before his wedding the twenty-four-year-old John was to be found pacing the floor declaring: "'I can't go through with it! I can't go through with it!'"<sup>8</sup> As Graves says, there are few clues in Powys's letters as to what initially drew him to Margaret;<sup>9</sup> but the early fiction can be seen as an exercise in self-exploration, and future biographers will undoubtedly draw heavily on it in fleshing-out the story of Powys's unlikely engagement and marriage.

In the A and B texts Owen and his fiancée are completely unsuited; in C, however, Elspeth is boyish and interesting, almost the ideal Powysian woman. But although Philip feels affection for her he does not feel passion, and continues to crave escape. He tries to discuss the possibility of breaking off their engagement by saying he hates the institution of marriage and would be happier if people could just live together. Elspeth is frightened by the direction of this conversation and begs him to stop torturing her. Later, however, she strips naked to go swimming in a pond, and while hiding in the reeds overhears Philip discussing his feelings with Hugh Bigod. Hugh throws a heavy stick at something moving nearby and after the young men wander off Elspeth emerges bleeding and dazed, wounded on all levels. The text is soon abandoned but there is the

suggestion that this Elspeth might be noble and loving enough to give the Powys-hero the freedom she now knows is so important to him.

The tantalizing possibility of escape is there—in A2 and B Owen could run off with Lacrima, in C Elspeth might release him. But we never actually get to this point and the alternative is relentlessly present in the shape of Mr de Woztnak's tortuous marriage:

Her image rose before him and suffocated him—He felt compelled to call upon all the miserable blank hours he had spent in her society—they rose, they fluttered round him squeaking like bats.

.....  
 . . . day after day year after year bound hand and foot to one he hated—one who embodied for him all that his shrinking flesh and his disgusted spirit most loathed and abhorred.

He asked himself why he did not rise up and leave her? He was a free agent, he had only to go baldly to the nearest railway station, take his ticket and be whirled into the midst of the big city where all the Mrs de Woztnaks in the world could not find him again—He had only to make one supreme effort—Ah! That one effort—so easy to think of—so easy to talk of! and so hard to accomplish—He tried to find out what it was that really withheld him—Was it fear? Was it pity? Was it a sense of duty? Or was it not rather simply Custom— . . . Custom that with invisible webs light as gossamer but hard as steel binds us hand and foot to the bed we have made for ourselves and in which we must live to the end—then Mr de Woztnak wondered why since he could not alter his life he did not end it—<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \*

Although the Elspeth/Ray figure changes in temperament throughout these texts she is consistent in that she never becomes a rounded character but remains a type. Lacrima comes closer to a personality of her own, but just as the Powys-hero has problems communicating his feelings to his fiancée, so Powys has problems in giving his early women any real feelings. When Lacrima arrives at Greyhelmstone she eagerly jumps off the train and in this figure

in its blue serge dress and white straw hat we catch a brief glimpse of an independent character. But almost immediately the young Edwardian disappears into a plethora of Hellenic similes and idealized femininity:

O Beauty! So much talked about and so seldom seen; Dweller in the brains of passionate poets; Disrupter of Households; Perverter of Priesthoods, portress of Paradis and yet vice-regent of Hell, what ecstasies and what sorrows thou has given birth to! Incarnate in the body of that sweet Greek, Helen, thou didst drag the manly limbs of Hector in the dust and wrought the death of his Godlike Slayer; as Queen of Egypt thou dist entangle in thy embraces a Caesar and an Antony (B, vii).

And so on, for over a page. Mr de Woztnak, Cousin Taxater, Hugh Bigod and Dr O'Stein are also two-dimensional, but as portraits of living people they do have some spark of real life whereas the female figures never convey much feeling of reality. The situation may have been based on fact, however the Powys-hero's fiancée functions not so much as a *roman à clef* character in her own right but as a symbolic representative of the threatening, conventional world.

The small band of male friends opposes that world and provides an unconventional, subversive chorus on the Powys-hero's doings, as well as long discussions on Art, Morality, Politics, Sex and Religion. These discussions read as reported conversations and are interesting in that they express ideas that will be more successfully incorporated into the later published works. But they do nothing for the flow of a novel, and in one short section of manuscript, the first-person narrator listens to one of these debates and effectively sums up the whole:

For myself, I always found these casuistical discussions between My Cousin Taxater and Dr. Placket very wearisome—It seemed to me that they led nowhere—<sup>11</sup>

Both Powys and his text seem bogged down by these rather tedious conversations and this is symptomatic of a larger problem, the lack of any real plot. Scattered through-

out the manuscripts there are numerous proposed plans and outlines, and it is telling that in these characters and episodes take precedence over what little story there is. Chapters tend to concentrate on single scenes—descriptions of landscape or people, the long discussions between the friends—and there is frequently no sense of connection from one to the next. Powys would eventually use an episodic structure to full advantage in works like *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), *Weymouth Sands* and *Porius* (1951), but he fails to achieve anything like this in these early works, where he seems as incapable of coming to a conclusion as his hero.

Recognition of this is made throughout in the Powys-hero's feelings about his role as a poet. He knows he has moments of awareness and insight:

. . . his manuscript books were full of flashes of this kind; but any attempt to weave them into a complete poem, any attempt at a deliberate patient work of art, usually ended in disgust and weariness . . . his best work was a mere collection of fragments. Philip himself only vaguely recognized this. He was so accustomed to dwelling in his own peculiar region of thought where there was no possibility of definiteness that, in spite of his desire to write in such a way as would appeal to others, he never really considered the most elemental laws of poetic expression—He wondered sometimes how it was that, while continually writing, his work never took form or shape, but he did nothing to correct the deficiency—(D)

He would work—but who could promise his work success? Had it even started on the road to success? Of his inherent poetic capacity Glendower felt no doubt; of the existence in him of a new and original attitude towards Nature he felt no doubt, but when it came to expression, to the created symbol, to the architectonics of poetry, to all that is meant by the words Art and Form, he felt that unless by some building up of character at present alien from him much was wanting, much was deficient. (E, ii)

Deficiency, deficient: the ability to recognise areas of weakness is an important

part of the writing process. Important too is the statement of ambition, the desire to be a successful poet, (a writer), and the belief that the writing is to function as a vehicle for a particular attitude towards nature. Richard Perceval Graves suggests that the young Powys "was very much more ambitious than he later pretended in the *Autobiography*"<sup>12</sup> and the early texts certainly support this: the Powys-hero's poetry causes him almost as much concern as his ill-judged engagement. Graves also says that these poetic ambitions must have been disappointed by the response to the *Poems* (1899), which "were welcomed by some critics, but then sank without trace".<sup>13</sup> And in a few loose pages of manuscript Owen confesses as much when the flirtatious Glory Pontifex asks him if it is true that he has written a poem that has made him famous:

The nostrils of his pride snuffed up these sweet fumes . . . "Well!" he said "I have as a matter of fact published one volume of poetry—" "O" she cried with a little sparrow-like flutter, "how exciting! how thrilling! And did the critics praise it and the public read it? How delicious to see yourself in print!"—"The critics were adverse, the publisher exacting, the public indifferent—" "Poor Mr Glendower!"<sup>14</sup>

But he has no need for her pity, he explains, because he at least completed his task; until the artist persists in seeing his project through: "'He is perpetually making starts which come to nothing—He moves in a vicious circle instead of advancing—He remains ignorant whether he is a fool or an apprentice—" Apprentice or fool? Powys was unsure himself; what he was certain of, however, was the strength of his feelings about nature and the inanimate.

\* \* \*

In the Texas manuscript, Philip Warton considers the natural world around him and feels he can understand:

. . . how Wordsworth found towns and cities hard to assimilate into his scheme of culture—The tragedy of things the "lacrimae rerum"<sup>15</sup>

as it affects man is brought here in closer relationship with the same dark Element as it affects the other existences of the planet, and this affiliation of suffering, this widening of pain-horizons, gives to the human victim (at least in the eyes of poets) a dignity which is often lost elsewhere . . . Imagine a Tess of the D'Urbervilles without her Stour Valley or a Eustacia without the Heath she hated; does not the Tragedy become Pathos at once, the poetry of their sufferings prose? What in the great novelists who deal in town-life takes the place of Nature as a solvent for the too-petrifying influence of mortal woes? Something in its very essence is antipathetic to poetry—A sense of the ridiculous—this and this alone, call it humour, irony, wit—what you will, alone renders presentable and a proper subject for art the squalid loves, hates, laughter and tears of the inhabitants of towns—One writes realistically of the country and the effect however painful, however tragic, is large and grand—One writes realistically of towns and the effect is—what we read today. (iii)<sup>16</sup>

Like Owen in A1, Philip makes his entrance on the Downs, which are magnificently described as a great volcanic wave, hanging under a wide openness. Vast, moody, this landscape is too dramatic for what is to follow, although its importance is appropriate in terms of the Powys-hero's, and Powys's, feelings about nature. In the A1 text Owen stretches out on a grassy bank, and the sweep of land and sky sends a feeling through him which casts away the fetters of convention and tradition, leaving him emancipated, reborn. His is not a mystical, but a physical experience: through his bodily senses he shares in the inner life of the inanimate around him. Similarly, in the D text, Philip Davenant says he is "‘Doubtful of any spiritual basis in things’", and has "‘. . . long cultivated the art of living by sensations.’" Philip's is a negative capability which is a "kind of Pantheism", a "mixing with the elements, the ecstatic losing of himself in the Unity of the Earth". He feels that "one's scheme of life cannot be far wrong" if it is based on the one certainty in this bewildering world, the certainty that

there is an "interaction between . . . mind and the material universe".

This will have echoes throughout Powys's fiction, culminating in the final mixing of mind and matter that are the late fantasies. But although this attitude towards the inanimate is central to the Powys-hero, Hugh Bigod can dismiss it out of hand, declaring that Owen's "‘talk about worshipping nature is ridiculous—The Inanimate! Who can consider the Inanimate?’"<sup>17</sup>

The difference between the energetic, businesslike Hugh and the Powys-hero is really, as Philip Davenant realises, the difference between:

. . . the ways of the East and the West—the East was always so willing to dream over the mysterious action of vague large forces of life and death, to lose itself in the world-soul, the anima-mundi; the West so careful to build up its own self-conscious, definite, character by energetic labour, by patient creation—Philip remembered how Walter Pater in his Essays, speaking of the Dorian compared with the Ionian tendency in Greek Art, used the word centripetal for the one and centrifugal for the other—Well! His method of living was centrifugal, Ionian—(D)

Powys's own methods of living, and writing, would continue to be Ionian; the relationship between the individual and the inanimate would continue to be central to his work. In these early fragments he establishes his aims and explores the means of achieving them. Most important of all, however, he also finds his own voice. Philip Davenant desires:

. . . to put into words his philosophy of life—He hoped to make verses significantly good to enable him to earn his livelihood by them; to pay the debt he owed humanity in solid work—But there was at the outset a serious difficulty—His methods of contemplation, of waiting for Nature to draw aside her own veil naturally, resulted in sensation too fine, too subtle, to be put into human words—As Cousin Taxater used to say—'Language is the inheritance that comes to us from Humanity'—How then could he use language effectively while cutting himself off from human-

ity? If his object was to grow more and more wedded to the inanimate world of grass and stones, surely the language not of men but of grass and stones would be the one for him to aim at? On the other hand there must have been, throughout the ages, men of a similar tendency with himself, whose attempts to speak their sensations must have in some degree crept into language he used. Perhaps after all it only needed more genius, more elaborate and painstaking care, to find such words or others upon which he could put his own stamp—(D)

Throughout these early texts the “men of similar tendency”—Wordsworth, Pater, Whitman, Hardy—are frequently referred

to, their influence is often obvious. But where Powys's early verse is almost wholly derivative and unoriginal, this early prose is not, for Powys discovered the language he was looking for, the language of “grass and stones”, in prose rather than poetry: in these fragile pages of manuscript we see him discovering himself as a novelist.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Mr Philip W. Davies, of the Department of Manuscripts and Records at the National Library of Wales, for his excellent advice and assistance during my work on these manuscripts.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Autobiography*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934; rpt. London: Macdonald, 1967, pp. 314-15. Subsequent references within the text refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup>An untitled novel commencing “How Philip Warton came to Godbarrow”, in Notebooks 1897-1900, MS. Hanley Collection. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. This ms is unpaginated and roman numerals within my text refer to chapter numbers. For the sake of convenience I will refer to this work as the Texas text or ms; it should be noted, however, that this is not the only piece of Powys's early fiction in the Hanley collection.

<sup>3</sup>In the 1970s *The Powys Newsletter*, Hamilton, N.Y.: Colgate University Press, began the task of locating mss by members of the Powys family held in the United States. Descriptions of collections were published in numbers 1 (1970), 2 (1971), 3 (1972-73), 4 (1974-75) and 5 (1977-78). The largest holdings of John Cowper Powys mss were found at the University of Texas, at Austin; Colgate University, N.Y.; and Syracuse University, N.Y. Numbers 3 and 5 of the *Newsletter* also give details of E. E. Bissell's collection at Ashorne, Warwickshire.

<sup>4</sup>These letters do not necessarily suggest the order of composition. The mss are unpaginated and roman numerals within my text will refer to chapter numbers which appear in some, though not all, of the mss. References to short sections of ms will be given in footnotes. I have standardised the spelling and, occasionally, inserted necessary punctuation. These mss are as yet uncatalogued but can be located as “Works Without Names”, Department of Manuscripts and Records, National Library of Wales.

<sup>5</sup>*The Saturnian Quest: John Cowper Powys, A Study of His Prose Works*, 2nd ed., Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>In the *Autobiography* Powys says it “was in those earlier Burpham days, after my son was born, thirty years later than my own birth . . . that I suddenly acquired a passion for everything Welsh.” See pp. 334-36.

<sup>7</sup>*Letters of John Cowper Powys to His Brother Llewelyn*, ed. Malcolm Elwin. 2 Vols, London: Village Press, 1975.

<sup>8</sup>*The Brothers Powys*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>Section beginning: “Mr de Woztnak sat with his chin resting upon his knees—”

<sup>11</sup>Section beginning: “My Cousin Taxater crossed his legs over his stomach and pushed out his underlip in the manner of the Emperor Nero.”

<sup>12</sup>*The Brothers Powys*, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Section beginning: “The river Nura had reached that point . . .”

<sup>15</sup>Powys probably got this phrase from Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1886). See chapter 25, “Sunt Lacrimae Rerum”.

<sup>16</sup>A few lines on, the narrator distances himself slightly, saying: “It is evident by this time to the reader that Mr Philip Warton (for from his brain we have borrowed the above opinions) has not read Mr George Meredith—that is a pity—He might then have learnt how the complete modern man combining all things in himself . . . is able without difficulty to be both Cockney and Countryman, a Chesterfield and a Robert Burns, but not having read that author the foregoing reflections were forced irresistably upon him—”

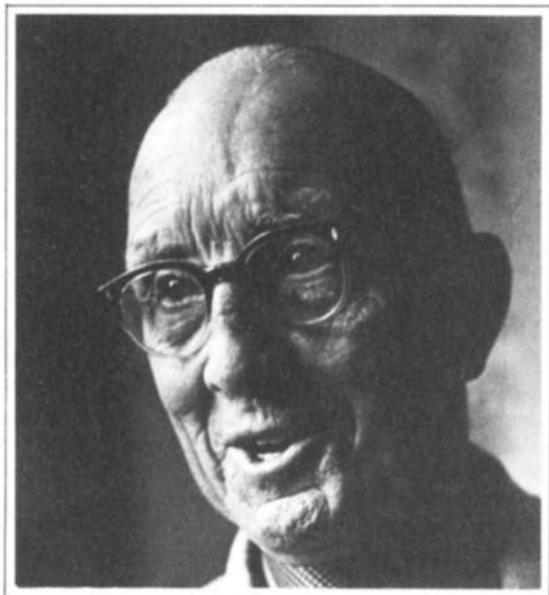
<sup>17</sup>Section beginning: “Mr de Woztnak, Cousin Taxater and Dr O'Stein had arranged to meet in a tavern . . .”

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# Littleton Powys to A. G. Prys-Jones

Introduced and edited by Don Dale-Jones

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A. G. Prys-Jones

Photo: Welsh Arts Council

A. G. Prys-Jones (1888-1987) was born at Denbigh, where his parents were head-teachers, and liked to trace his ancestry back through Tomos Prys, Plas Iolyn (1564?-1634) to Rhys ap Maredudd. From Llandovery College he gained a Scholarship in History to Jesus College, Oxford. After military service he taught in grammar schools before becoming one of His Majesty's Inspectors in Wales. A patriotic Welsh-speaking Welshman, and one of the most distinguished of his generation, he is remembered particularly as poet, historian, educationalist and indefatigable propagator of his nation and his culture. His *Welsh Poets* (1917) was the first anthology of Anglo-Welsh poetry. He was President of the English Language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig from its early years until his death.

The schoolboy at Llandovery ("those . . . brown eyes that used to look so earnestly at me in the IVth Form room") was inspired by the personality and teaching of Littleton Powys:

it was Littleton . . . who first awoke in me the desire to express myself in verse. He was one of the most truly spiritual men I have ever met—yet full of buoyant life and interests—a great lover of nature, a fine cricketer and as handsome as a young Greek god. He had a beautiful speaking voice—and it was quite thrilling to hear him read poetry to us.

(letter to Raymond Garlick, 16 March 1958)

The correspondence inspired by the copy of *Poems of Wales* which Prys-Jones sent to Powys in 1923 is, unfortunately, lost. About twenty-six years later the following exchange arose out of an article by Prys-Jones on Llewelyn Powys in the *Western Mail*. The long sympathy between these two attractive and spiritual men is beautifully evident from Powys's side of their correspondence.

The Quarry House,  
Sherborne,  
Dorset.

19 July 1949

My dear 'Prys' (I believe that is how I used to address you years and years ago)—Luckily I have a sort of agent in Swansea—Glyn Griffiths Eynon—he who persuaded me 4 years ago to go to Swansea and talk to the Bookman's Society on the Powys Family and to the Rotary on my pet subject 'The Importance of Field Natural History in Education'—and he like a faithful fellow has sent me 3 copies of the *Western Mail* of July 13th which contains your really excellent and most sympathetic and understanding article about our dear Llewelyn. You may imagine how

pleased I was to read it and see that the championship of the causes that he had at heart 'brought him fully in accord with the (Christian) Ethic'. How true this was—It was the hypocrisy and humbug so often rife among those who called themselves Christians which offended him—I enjoyed the booklet of advice to a young poet very much: he avoided the controversial matters from which in giving advice I cannot escape! His advice on *manners* was particularly good—I have wanted for ever so long to write to you and hear from you but I could [not] get your address and even now I am simply sending this to you c/o Western Mail. The last time we corresponded was when you were good enough to send me your first book of poems 'The Poems of Wales'.\* Only a few weeks ago I read them through again and liked many of them very much, I also read with much pleasure the letter which came to me with them. You must write and tell me how you are getting on—you and your family. For I fancy you told me that you had a family when you came to meet Mabel and me when our old friend Thomas the Warden\*\* brought us over the mountain to have lunch with T. W. David amid his fern-grottoes! Since that lunch party in 1937 much has happened to me—my dear Mabel died in 1942 and then all unexpectedly the Gods sent to me a wife one of the choicest spirits of the age, Elizabeth Myers; we had 3½ years of supreme happiness though she was struggling with TB all the time and then after we returned from Arizona where we spent the winter of 1946-7 she quite suddenly died. I am now engaged in getting together material for a memoir for her life story with the years of *self-education-for-a-definite* purpose is one of intense interest and I think of great value as an example. At present I am dealing with her letters from which I shall make a selection for one section of the book—I don't think you will be bored by reading her advice to a young poet (an able man in a good position, William Cox) and you will see her as a valuable teacher:

"I have now read your poems attentively and I don't think you need feel at all despondent. There's no doubt at all about your possessing the poetic vision. I think it will take you longer than some to achieve recognition because of your individual style which has a choice and delicate character full of integrity, but not of the order which is immediately popular. So much the better!

\*This would be 1923, 26 years previously.

\*\*T. Walter Thomas of Llandovery College.

"Of the poems you send I am suggesting a market for some, and as to the rest they show in some way evidence of that flaw you told me you felt you had without quite knowing what it was. I don't pretend to know you better than you know yourself, but from a careful study of your poetry one thing does seem to emerge and it's this: *between the warmth of conception in your heart and its ordered expression from your intellect* a certain chilling seems to take place and this causes the poem to seem as if your image of emotion is being *described* instead of *begotten*; so strongly do I feel this that sometimes I almost felt I knew the exact point when you stopped feeling *in* and began to feel *with*. It does seem to me that consciously or maybe subconsciously there is a struggle going on between your heart and your intellect. The vision of your heart is so true and so warm, and then when your intellect receives it your *reasoning powers* clap on to it something adventitious in order to comply with *their* notions of what's what; but to reason so often negates and deforms the original perfection which came straight from the heart.

"This constant war between the head and the heart is one I suffer from too, and perhaps the best thing I can do is to tell you how I struggle against the staying intellect. So much of my work has been still-born because of my reason, and it seems to me that too often I have allowed the wisdom of my heart, the little child's true wisdom of my heart to be trampled on by what my reason thinks is the Truth. Now the odd thing about that is *not* that one should tell or paint truth itself, but that one should give the 'sensation' of truth. If your aunt Emily dies and you describe the funeral precisely as it took place, following the exact truth dictated by your reason, the result is very competent but very unalive. It's *kitch* writing. The business of art is to change subjective truth into objective truth. And the *objectivity* must be swaddled round your image *while it is pulsing in your heart*. This acts as it were as a crystalization which sets for ever the conceived image or emotion, and when it *thus* reaches the brain, the *ice there* can have no power over what has been *fixed* not in the ice of the intellect, but fixed by the force of one's heart's inner light and warmth".

Then comes advice "as to placing" his poems! Well you can see the style of poet she was writing to: there are not a few of them about. I hope this hasn't bored you but knowing you are interested in these things I copied it out. Today I received some of the letters she wrote to Walter de la Mare

—their correspondence was a lovely one: and I am busy with them. So no more: but, my dear Prys, (I can see the little eager boy listening to me reading very simple poetry, but notwithstanding, it was poetry) write to me and tell me of yourself. I thank you very much for that article about Llewelyn.

Yr. old friend  
Littleton Powys

I am *very lame* with arthritis otherwise in perfect health.

1 August 1949

My dear Prys,

Thank you, my dear, for thinking of me and sending 'the Mail' with that pleasing article about the family and the photo of Betty Muntz's piece of sculpture—It is good of that old brother of mine; who has after all his searchings found God at last and is daily to be found contemplating HIM in the lovely little Church of Mappowder which lies just over his garden wall! I thought of you when I read yesterday for the 1st lesson in our glorious Abbey—the first 16 verses of the 5th Chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon. I hope your 'Fountain of Life' includes the Apocrypha, for there I find some of the most beautiful verses.—You probably know those verses, but if not for God's sake read them and you will rejoice. I look forward to seeing your 'Fountain'—I go on reading the Morning Lessons more for my love of the language so lovely and musical than from any sense of duty! I am starting on my lecture on Elizabeth this very morning so no more.

I have definitely broken away from the Sherborne School Games. The Pilgrims (Old Boys XI) are playing a series of matches here—I can't waste my time watching them and I have refused to go to a merry dinner tonight. . . . I hardly know any of them and it would be more of a strain than anything. I wish you were going to spend the evening with me.

Yrs ever,  
Littleton

P.S.

A fellow I have recently met named Maurice Carpenter is a poet and definitely full of poetic vision and the power of words. He is engaged on a considerable work of which he has sent me the 2 first books with some remarkable illustrations—BUT both the illustrations and the poems

mean absolutely nothing to me. Apparently he believes that this 'unintelligible stuff' is to form New Poetry—I have also had sent to me by Nora Nicholson who is playing one of the lady parts a copy of this most successful play "A Lady's Not for Burning": the modern play goes apparently love it. There is hardly a word spoken without a certain clever wit which is beyond my old brain—but at the end of it where are you? I suppose they have temporarily escaped from the seriousness of the world's muddle, and can go about throwing these quick entertaining phrases here there and everywhere—But I say, as Goethe, I prefer the things that are abiding—the things, the simple beauties of the country, which would give these poor strugglers real peace.

15 October 1949

Well, my dear Prys, your parcel which I opened this morning has brought me real joy! It came too just at the right moment, for, after 2 and ½ years without any sort of sickness, I suddenly last Wednesday found myself in the clutches of the Common Cold and the invasion was so vigorous that I spent Thursday in bed with a temperature of over 100: I am much better now but have just rung up the Vicar to say I shall not be reading the lessons in the Abbey tomorrow—and so instead of reading them in the Abbey I shall be reading to myself these glorious passages I know so well, chosen in the form of an anthology, by another lover of these creations of inspired man.

This is what Elizabeth wrote of me to Leo H. Myers with whom she had a most happy correspondence until he died suddenly: "Littleton is *not* a convert, and never would be one. He is a truly *good man*. He is a jolly pagan, who reads the lessons every Sunday morning in Sherborne Abbey, for no other reason than that he has a magnificent speaking voice and likes to exercise it on the great literature of the Testaments." This is largely true; but it also pleases me to feel that I am helping those who are endeavouring to carry on the traditions of a great heritage.

I love handling your lovely collection; you have chosen the passages that I should have chosen for my lesson reading: and they delight my heart. I read too your tribute to Edward Thomas and the review of his Collected Poems. Robert Frost is a fine poet. I think 'Prys' is too, for your poem about E. T. seemed to me *just right*, I thought it excellent. Thank you very very much.

Yr. affec. Littleton.

Stronghold  
West Pennard  
Glastonbury  
Somerset

20 October 1952

Here is a little gift in the form of a booklet I have had printed giving the Lecture I gave at Swansea in 1945 with some additions and the whole thing revised. This appeared in the Welsh Review and in Denys [Val Baker]'s Little Reviews—It is a handy little booklet of the family and gives some account of the feminine achievements which are not often mentioned.

My Elizabeth's fame spreads steadily—it has now reached Japan. But what pleases me so much she is so truly *Catholic* and all embracing—in her message of happiness and love that every brand of Faith seeks to welcome her . . .

So I am very happy—though my eyes are becoming dimmer and dimmer.

My love to you, *Prys*,  
Yr. affec. friend  
Littleton.

West Pennard

28 October, 1952

Bless you for your letter and for the enclosures, your excellent review of Gollancz's [*sic*] book, so sympathetic and ready to find the best in it—O my dear Prys why aren't all reviewers like you who use kindness and sympathy and if they don't like a book *don't* review it—I have recently read some reviews on poetry by a *fellow* called *Ralph* Abercrombie—Lascelles I know something of and liked—but this *Ralph* who is he? What right has he to write and *damn* the magnificent efforts of Jack Clemo who had to leave his village school at 12 because of blindness and now is totally deaf as well and yet has produced a novel and an autobiography—the novel a 'prize' book and the autobiography highly thought of in his struggle to show *the importance* of Religion. And there is this pampered and spoilt *Ralph* writing the cruellest things he can think of. I wrote a letter of my feelings about it to the Editor of the Spectator—knowing well that I should have no answer but hoping he might drop this unpleasant young man, but he has not done so—and the other *fellow* I can't stand is really a

poet—but he is a bad man preaching a *callousness* to animals . . . 'let us as good Catholics watch Bullfights'—*Roy Campbell*.

I wrote a letter to the Editor of The Poetry Review about HIM when he made an evil attack on Geoffrey Grigson—I think because in G. G.'s anthology of modern verses R. C.'s poetry had been omitted—and in the attack on G. G. he had said how he wasted his time studying wild flowers!! That drew me—

I am sorry Prys, my dear, because you are so kind and such a lover of peace and beauty and kindness and goodness and a hater of cruelty that thinking of you has made me rebel against these so called literateurs. Forgive me. This was to thank you for all your generous words about my Lecture—about the Powys Family—I have sent a copy to the British Museum, to the London Library, to the Dorset and Somerset County Libraries—they wanted more—to the Cambridge University Library—to my Corpus Library. Mention is made of 7 old Corpus men in the booklet.

I think I shall send a couple of copies to the Secretary of the Glo. and Somerset Bookman's Association.

No more—and yet I must say how I liked your picture of autumn at Porthcawl—I liked it very much—but how much more I should have liked it, had it been written in one of those lyrical metres you used to know so well—But then I am older and probably in the school of Poetry more conservative than you. But John and I did actually give the Prize (one year, 1948 I think it was) (7 competitors) to a Free Verse poem in the Sherborne School Competition My love to you and my blessings upon you your wife and your sons and daughters and grandchildren.

Yr. Littleton

West Pennard

23 December, 1952

You must forgive me for not having written to you before. I was away in the British Eye Hospital for 2½ weeks having the cataract removed from my right eye. And that eye although the operation was completely successful will be useless until a *lens* in the shape of spectacles has been supplied by the great man Ramsay Gardiner to take the place of the lens of the eye which was removed by [?] with the cataract.

—I am going up to Clifton on Thursday Jan 1st and after that I should be able to see with the spectacles practically normally. He is a wonderful man 'making the blind to see' in the true gospel way. I am giving him Elizabeth's letters and with the inscription am quoting from Matthew Arnold's 'The Better Part' [: read it] if you haven't done so recently. It is really Llewelyn's philosophy with the lines "Hath man no second life? -Pitch this one high" but the last couplet runs "Is [actually "was"] Christ a man as we are [like us]? [Ah] Let us try If we then, too, can be such men as He." And I should go on "You seem to have made some very good attempts—I have my own experience as a witness." But this means, my dear, that I shall keep your poem and your extract on Noyes to read after this but I am sending them pro tem to John Cowper who I know will be interested in your praise (well deserved) of his younger brother and your reference to his love of Wales—My dear Prys, I know going up to Bristol was a great adventure—and it was one that was full of delight to me—I was so happy with the Nurses, young Hebes I call them, with their rounded arms looking like "the polished corners of the temple".—My operation was not long and caused little pain, and there was a sister I discovered holding my hand! But I had feared the long dark two days when the eyes were bandaged—so I had learnt by heart 4 or 5 of Matthew Arnold's poems and 4 or 5 of Thomas Hardy's. But it was unnecessary, for there passed before my eyes vista after vista of beautiful landscapes, trees, hills, rivers, mountains, glimpses of the sea and lakes and Norman castles, pleasing Victorian Houses and then again meadows crowded with woods. The rivers were mostly of the type we love most like the Towy at Llandovery—I must not write more—but will see I have much to be thankful for.

West Pennard

25 January 1953

How good you are to me and how faithful, what a delightful article you wrote on that little booklet. I am grateful to you for your sympathy and interest. And I was so pleased to have your photograph—I looked at it and saw in it those same brown eyes that used to look so earnestly at me in the IVth Form room at Llandovery. I remember that we did much when Thomas had

driven Mabel and me over to have lunch with T. W. David and you joined us.

I have gone forward a little, indeed a great deal, because I received on Friday my reading glasses and so now will have no difficulty with my letters and will be able to read books and papers again. And on Saturday my long glasses which have given me great joy. I put them on and could see clearly on the mantel-piece my photographs of Mabel and Elizabeth and others whom I have only seen 'as through a glass darkly' for a long time.—And so too with my pictures and portraits.

I went to the post office this morning, my longest walk—40 yds and I saw so much more than I have been seeing lately.

Think of you being a grandfather over and over again My love to you

Yr. affec. Littleton

West Pennard

16 April 1953

I was delighted with your review of my old brother's book. The publisher (McDonald & Co) and Mr Harvey sent me a complimentary copy and John as always sent me a copy with this a Greek quotation from the Odyssey and I had to get him to translate it; my Greek has become so rusty.

But, Prys, why your review meant so much to me was that you reviewed it so generously. I had written to John saying that I had always before loved his philosophic books (better than his novels) but this one did not give me the usual pleasure. Hitherto he has always considered the chances of another life in the next world were 50/50 which is what I fancy would represent the human attitude to the future life—but in this book he becomes as I told him the 'disciple' of Llewelyn and supports annihilation. Well: neither you nor I agree with him, and I expressed my disappointment to him very definitely, but you were so generous to him. With my Mabel, whom you met, and my Elizabeth, whose personality you know well, waiting for me I cannot contemplate no future—and of course further in the workings of Nature herself the message of hope is given. Your review has helped me. I have a chapter and a bit more to read.

Yesterday I went to see an old boy of mine who lives near Taunton and who is housing my

nephew the R. C. Priest, Littleton III for a few days; the Littleton is grievously ill with a disease, the progress of which is unmistakable and most sad to watch, something in the nature of creeping paralysis. I pray, Death always kind, may take him soon. But he, *like his father, J. C. P.* loves life and wishes to enjoy it and has no desire to say goodbye to the Earth he loves. There is no humbug about this Catholic priest. He certainly has not the faith of my Elizabeth with his, "You know, Littleton, we don't belong here really, this is only our testing ground." [T]he barrier for her between the 2 worlds was always very thin: "I feel we have only just to give a little prick and if we do it properly we shall be through". I bet you and your wife are moving nearer to your children and your grandchildren and may God bless you all.

25 May 1953

I sent your 2 books—*Poems of Wales 1923* and *Green Places 1948* to a new pen-friend of mine made through her love of Elizabeth—whom in a way she resembles for she left school at 13 and has been a delicate girl since and her education has been in her own hands of which she says the most profitable years were the 2 she spent behind the counter in W. H. Smith's Book Shop in Birmingham where she found a kind boss who helped her and she says is still her friend. She is only just 23 and just married to her John—a schoolmaster—look, Prys, I send her letter which deals with your books as well as other things, she is my educator about Rainer Maria Rilke from whose poems she quotes quite happily in German; and I love being educated in this way. It was I who introduced her to the Benedictine Editor of *Pax* of whom I am very fond and of course he has put her on to Von Hugel's letters and she is so wise about them—I thought her letter would amuse you but please send it back—I enclose also 2 sonnets [to] Elizabeth—Sara Jackson's inspired by 'A Well Full of Leaves' and Pauline's by Elizabeth's attitude to the other, the next world. Please return them likewise.

I have Sara (really a Mrs Thomas) . . . coming to stay with me just after the Coronation—she is a poet and I look forward to her visit.

Last week I had a three days' visit from Hugh l'A Fausset of the Manchester Guardian and other papers. I found him and I knew I should from his 'Towards Fidelity' a very dear man and

a very intelligent one. We talked without ceasing (metaphysics barred). I found him very sympathetic and very inspiring.

Well how are you now my dear in your London home?

23 June 1953

I am sorry I have been a bother when you were so busy settling in—but you are in now and God bless you and you are in the centre of everything and I expect you will find many opportunities of saying and hearing things to lift up your heart. I knew you would be pleased with Pauline's letter, her intellectual progress reminds me somewhat of Elizabeth's. It seems to me there are indeed compensations for illness. She is endeavouring to give me instruction concerning Rainer Maria Rilke and Fausset has joined in by sending me a copy of selections on his 'Poets and Pundits' a most interesting collection of essays which includes 2 on Rilke. Have just read a very wise and comprehensive book called 'Speaking Poetry' written by Geoffrey Crump who was for 3 or 4 years an assistant master of mine before going to Bedales and becoming English Master there. He seemed in those early days to have more imagination than is possessed by the average master. R. Church wrote enthusiastically of it in *The Spectator* and I think it good. But I don't feel I need all his instructions on speaking poetry. He seems afraid of the Poetic Voice—or rather 'puta'.

I can manage all right with the glasses I have had given me but they will never give me back the sight I had. But there is no fear of my not being able to read or write for which I am thankful. And I am at home with my legs and have to be content with 'crawling' to the P.O. 40 yds away—But I am very happy in my correspondence and my visitors. Sara Jackson a most lovely creature with a mane of golden hair gave me three Golden Days, I took her to Wales and Glastonbury to the Polden hills and introduced her to the 'Wales violet'. We were very happy together. It is wonderful what friends you can make with your pen. I am so grateful for our friendship, dear Prys.

Yr affec. Littleton

My love and blessing be on your household.

18 February 1954

I do thank you for your letter: for it is always a joy to me to hear from you. I should have liked to hear your lecture to the Cardiff Poetry Society. How Excellent that they should have one!

I enclose two pieces of writing [?] I had printed in a booklet form. They are worth it. The appreciation of Theodore is first rate and itself contains two superb pieces of writing one by Llewelyn and [one] by Theodore when Death speaks and wonders what would happen were he to die. No one knows who JCL is, I go on trying to find out. Littleton's Poem which I consider after me in the old Miltonic grand style—was composed by him during those last weeks of his life: he an R. C. priest aged only 51, John Cowper's son, was dying in St Teresa's Hospital of creeping paralysis. He was without arms, without hands, without legs, the muscles of his tongue had gone so that to me his attempts at speech were to me inarticulate: but there was an 'Angel in the House' whose name was Dinah who ministered unto him (God bless these women) and she miraculously could hear what he said: and his mind during those last weeks was filled with these lovely thoughts of God manifesting himself in Nature and as he composed the lines of his Ode, Dinah wrote them down and then sent them to me bit by bit till I had the 4 first stanzas which he called Pt I printed; first typed—he was just starting on Pt II but I doubted whether he would finish it—However I got Pt I printed and Dinah said he was thrilled about it and he and she saw the Proof of it and corrected it, "We've corrected it" she wrote—but the Printers were a little slow and he never saw the little booklets complete—so I got them to print on it 'And in His Memory'. How I love a poem of this sort compared with so much that is produced now which literally is beyond me and I swear its not worth my wasting my time over it—But of course Prys what pleased me particularly was that this excellent R.C. priest should in his last weeks go to *God in Nature* where the *Peace that passeth Understanding* is to be found.

My love, dear Prys  
Yr. affectionate  
Littleton

1 April 1954

My dear faithful Prys,

You have been good to me and you certainly know how to put yourself into the life of

another, and give out, what I call, perfect sympathy. You have made me feel that ever since you sent me your first book of poems: and it does make such a difference—to know that you will get sympathy from a friend—I am so sorry your wife has been so unwell, not only for herself, but because her illness must make such a difference to you—I always used to think a sick wife makes a man half a man. I do hope that she is really better now—I am so glad you liked Littleton's Ode. What pleased me so much was that those beautiful thoughts should have come to him just at that time. It made his death a triumph—something to be proud of instead of calling for grief. To escape from such a fell illness with the mind full of God manifesting Himself in Nature seems well nigh a miracle.

Campbell Nairn wrote beautifully to me about it ending with "How Elizabeth would have rejoiced in such a brave end and such a testament."

I have just opened the paper to see that Llandovery won in their match against Sherborne—which takes me back to another win of Llandovery against Sherborne at Cardiff in 1903 which gave me the greatest pleasure, for the forwards were my charge. I must send a p.c. to J. P. Williams about it. It seems to have been a good match. I hope they go on to win more.

My friend Maria Hutchings hopes to go at Easter with some friends to explore that part of Wales. It can't be beaten, that wonderful Towy Valley. My inward eye can be very busy in the neighbourhood of Twm Shon Cati's cave and Rhandirmwyn.

You see what Llandovery's victory has done for me. Until I have something to show you. Farewell, dear friend and bless you.

undated

Christmas Eve with the sun streaming in upon me. Wonderful it is for an old man like me. I have had 3 hrs of sunshine as I sat in my chair this morning: the only place where I feel myself top-dog: for I could face anyone here.

Dear, dear Prys; if you are true in saying I have a sunny temperament, and I pray you are, I can say the same of you—it breathes forth in your writing in your reviews and in your poetry. I thought your little poem on your card of good wishes very charming—it is wonderful to me how we have come so close to each other in spirit after all these years—it must really be *through* all

these years—but we have met again. Thank you my dear Prys from the bottom of my heart for your kind words and thank your wife too. Now I am sending you for the card *two little extracts* which I must ask you to return because one is a last copy and the other nearly so—

(1) The little Poem which made me feel both proud and humble, came from Myra Reeves who played the part of Lady Bridgewater in the Ludlow Comus—she is a schoolmaster's wife and a delightful woman. This poem is the result

of her dreaming that I was very ill and it was written and came with a letter of enquiries next day.

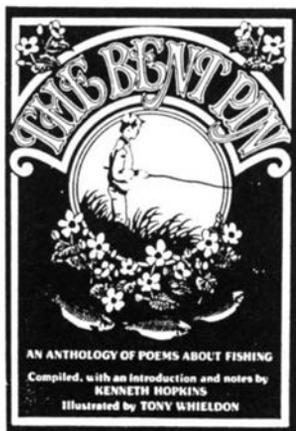
(2) The Powys Study so spontaneous and fresh at heart which is near the truth came in a letter from J. H. Harris of Bournemouth an interesting correspondent of mine.

No more. Much love to you.

Yr. Littleton

Best wishes to all yr. household.

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# Peter J. Foss

## The Religion of an Atheist: The Dawn at Seaton

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In late November 1913 Llewelyn Powys, then 25 years old, was staying with Miss Sawyer, an elderly friend he had met in Switzerland, in lodgings at 7 West Cliff, Seaton, a drab seaside town on the Devon coast.<sup>1</sup> It was not a good time for Llewelyn Powys; 1912 to 1913 represented a period of post-Clavadel depression when his tuberculosis had put paid to his teaching career, and he was still undecided as to a way in life. The death of his mother in 1914 and his journey to Africa, coinciding with the outbreak of the First World War, was to shape his life for the next five years, and was to confirm him in his philosophy of freethinking scepticism. In addition, Llewelyn in 1913 played on frustrations of another kind. In an early short story entitled “Un Mufle” (and originally to be called “The Snouted Pig”), set during this visit to Seaton, Llewelyn describes himself fantasising on the possibilities of a sexual encounter in the backstreets of the town, but brought abruptly and shame-facedly to a halt on finding that the object of his desire is a deaf-mute servant girl from the hotel.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst at Seaton Llewelyn paid a visit to an old friend of Louis Wilkinson’s family, the Anglo-Catholic priest Canon Stuckey Coles. This visit was the occasion of an experience which was revelatory in character and profoundly affected Llewelyn’s attitude to the Christian religion. References to it recur several times in his writings. Because of the ambiguity of the experience—signifying the presence of a transcendent deity, although ostensibly a natural phenomenon (the glory of a new-born day)—it became a touchstone against which Llewelyn might measure the substance of his atheistical creed.

Llewelyn’s visit to Palestine in 1929 gave him the opportunity as an avowed sceptic to confront the ‘incredible impossibilities’ of the Christian religion. This resulted in his overview of the Old Testament story entitled *The Cradle of God* (1929) and his “Study of Christianity”, *The Pathetic Fallacy* of 1930. In an important passage towards the end of *The Cradle of God* Llewelyn concedes that Truth may indeed reside in the “spirit” of Christianity, even if its tenets are false, and he goes on to describe the “strange, mystical power” which he had witnessed at Seaton in 1913 “watching the sun come up over the English channel”.<sup>3</sup> Another reference—this time in the essay called “The Oxford Movement” collected into *Damnable Opinions* of 1935—refers to the incident as revealing a “braver, more happy” secret than that provided by the Christian message.<sup>4</sup> This describes succinctly Llewelyn’s view that the mysteries of existence are revealed time and again in the phenomena of Nature, that they are suggestive of a numinous spirit inherent in things (the *numen inest* of Pater),<sup>5</sup> and that this coincides with the sense of the holy experienced by the Christian apologist.

This seems straightforward enough. However, the unpublished story called “The Dawn”, from an early stage of Llewelyn’s writing career—suggests in its structural irony and thematic paradox, the kind of ambiguity of response which frequently colours Llewelyn’s thinking on Christianity. What is most extraordinary about the story is the way it undermines the philosophical position Llewelyn strove to adopt in his life. It does this first by assuming the role of devil’s advocate in the preliminary discussion—the freethinker appears to

be arrogant, the atheist undogmatic—and then through the implications of the story itself, Llewelyn seems to admit not only to the possibility of the operation of the supernatural in life (the priest's ghost) but also to the truth of Christianity as he, the priest, sees it. The story is of course an *exemplum*, framed within the ironic context of a late-night discussion between a hearty free-thinker and a doubting atheist; and the example of scepticism, tolerance and

humanity which is put before the reader is fully in character with the sanity of Llewelyn Powys's vision.\*

\*The story "The Dawn" which follows is a 16-page undated holograph on A5-size paper in the collection of Mr E. E. Bissell. It is previously unpublished. I have amended punctuation and spellings throughout, but have retained paragraphs as in the original.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, London: Bodley head, 1946, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Llewelyn Powys, *Ebony and Ivory*, London: Grant Richards, 1923, p. 196. For this incident and Llewelyn's story in Seaton, see Louis Wilkinson, ed., *Letters of Llewelyn Powys*, London: The Bodley Head, 1943, p. 61. The date given however—1911—is incorrect, as are many of the dates and other references in Wilkinson's edition. Elwin's thoroughly-corrected proof-copy of the *Letters* is in Mr Bissell's collection, and should be consulted before reference is made to the *Letters*.

<sup>3</sup>Llewelyn Powys, *The Cradle of God*, London:

Jonathan Cape 1929, p. 229. See my own discussion of "The Dawn" in its relation to *The Cradle of God* in my Ph.D. thesis, "Llewelyn Powys: Epicurean-Mystic", University of Wales, 1987, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup>Llewelyn Powys, *Damnably Opinions*, London: Watts and Co., 1935, p. 20. The essay "The Oxford Group Movement" was first published in *The Literary Guide*, April 1933.

<sup>5</sup>Llewelyn was much influenced by the idea of the numinous, and the spirit of *Numa*, as he derived it from his reading of Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) in c.1909.

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# Llewelyn Powys

## The Dawn

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‘“There has been only one Christian and he died on the Cross.”’ My friend uttered the quotation with all the vindictive arrogance characteristic of a freethinker. ‘As for the religion of today,’ he continued, ‘it is false and detestable and appeals only to the mentally and physically ill-favoured. Enter what church you will. Who do you find there? Not the more distinguished portion of the community I can swear it—’

‘Why are you silent?’ he went on fiercely. ‘Everybody knows you to be an Atheist—do you not then also loath this bastard religion?’

I had realized for a long time that any attitude towards Christianity was irritating to my friend and now apparently the moment had arrived for some kind of explanation. But what was I to say? How was I to describe that queer experience which, Atheist though I am, has so deeply impressed me and has made it quite impossible for me to indulge in abuse or mockery of other people’s religion.

I decided to tell him the whole story and began as follows:

One autumn day some ten years ago I made an excursion to a little seaside town. I arrived at my very destination in the middle of the morning and rushed off to the sea shore. How excellent after a long absence to splash one’s hair and beard in wet liquid salt, which seems, so to speak, to give to the cosmos its divine flavour!

I spent long hours on the shingle beaches, my soul soothed and refreshed by the recurrent surging of the waves.

‘“Sophocles long ago heard it by the Aegean”,’ I shouted as I hurried on and on over the pebbles and dried seaweed and fragments of bleached cork. In those days I was young and in my pride and not easily tired.



Llewelyn Powys c.1903, a pencil sketch, 12" x 9", by Gertrude Mary Powys, previously unpublished. Courtesy of Mr Stephen Powys Marks.

I went far and when I got back my train—the 5.45—had already gone. It was the last which connected with my part of the country; so that there I was stranded for a long evening in that half-town half-village. The place

depressed me. Whatever did the unfortunate residents do to amuse themselves during the long winter evenings? Did they play draughts and backgammon like our grand parents?

A confectioner's window was piled with crackers in preparation for Christmas; the gorgeous colouring of so much tinsel paper was certainly the most cheerful note in the place. Attracted by its gaiety I crossed the street. Just as I reached the opposite pavement I observed a young girl looking into the window. She was pretty, pretty with the delicious prettiness of an English shop girl.

She wore a red Tam-o'-shanter from under which appeared wisps of fine hair blown by the evening breeze against the pale oval of her face. 'Good Evening,' I said and drew close, making as though I too was intensely interested in the gay decorations displayed. She seemed to be very shy and I could hardly hear her response—'What a dull day it has been,' I continued. 'I don't like the autumn, do you?' 'No,' she answered, 'I like the summer best—the place then has a little life—there are visitors.' 'Well, as I have missed my train I shall have to be a visitor for tonight,' I said. 'Can you advise me as to where to stay?' She thought for a moment, her face growing serious as the faces of tradespeople do when confronted by any problem which involves money.

She named a Hotel.

'Well,' I resumed, 'I won't go there just yet—I'll walk again by the sea shore—Can't you come with me; I am exceedingly lonely.' You know how one feels on such occasions—how a voice in the very pit of one's stomach cries out in agonized apprehension lest one should be disappointed. She made a mischievous pout of resignation and then as we began to move in the direction of the esplanade a hand was suddenly laid upon my shoulder.

I turned quickly. Who could it be? Who could presume to touch me in a town where I was unknown?

By my side stood an aged priest, perhaps the most venerable figure I have ever beheld. Surely one felt the live [s]oul from the altar has touched the lips of this man—of this last of the apostles.

With the utmost courtesy he raised his hat. 'May I speak to you a moment, Sir?' We walked away, his hand still on my shoulder. When we were out of earshot he spoke. 'I know,' he said, 'I have exceeded my privilege

as an old man and as a priest in thus accosting you, but I take particular interest in that girl. She is my God-child, and somehow you made me fear for her! He was absolutely disarming, this old man. I could only walk by his side silent, like a little boy who has been caught doing wrong. It was astonishing!—for years I had followed remorselessly on my own anti-nomian way, yet here I was in a moment of time lapsing into the old position of one conscious of sin—no, not quite that, rather of one conscious of authority, of the traditional authority either of the grey head or of the church itself.

He led me to his house, and when he understood I had missed my train begged me to stay with him. I accepted his invitation. I had been curiously affected by the romantic and unemotional nature of our acquaintance.



Llewelyn Powys when he was a private tutor at Calne, Wiltshire, May 1908, aged 23. A studio portrait marked J. J. Hunt, Ivy House Studio, Calne and Malmesbury. A previously unpublished photograph, courtesy of the late Mrs Lucy Penny.

We sat in a little upstairs room decorated with reproductions of various Renaissance pictures—pictures wonderfully and delicately coloured in gold and scarlet and blue, and as the hour grew later I was drawn on to make a kind of avowal of my belief.

I told him I was an atheist and that I believed there to be no purpose, no aim, no object in life, that just as each individual was made out of nothing, the child of Chance and a fortunate occasion, so also was the whole race, and that one and all in a day, in an hour, would become extinct and not a word said. I told him the only thing true in life was the awful reality of Death, and that Jesus was merely an inspired Jew whose amazing personality had mesmerized the half of the world, creating in man's brain the most pathetic of all the illusions under which it has been the lot of his race to labour. When at last I had finished I was horrified to discover that the old man was crying, that tear after tear was rolling down his placid priest's face. He spoke, and these were his words: 'I am an old man and I shall die soon, and I would that I might be permitted to prove my faith true by coming back to you after I am dead.'

The awfulness of this utterance gave me the kind of shock that one experiences on those rare occasions when the heightened intensity of life robs reality of its realness, when something seems to give way and one's soul is left for a brief and breathless moment suspended in naked isolation over the unfathomable obscure of Eternity. For a whole hour he pleaded with me gently, persuasively, laying stress on the reasonableness and beauty of his creed in a world where all is uncertain. Then he led me to my bedchamber, a little room at the top floor. The night was windy and I slept none too well. The adventures of the day must have agitated my nerves for I kept listening to phantom footsteps and knockings and hushed voices.

At last in the early morning I was waked from an uneasy sleep by a real rapping at my door. It was the Priest; he entered carrying a candle. 'Come,' he said gravely, 'come and look at the dawn.'

He led me across the landing to a room which he used as an oratory. At one end was a table with white dahlias upon it, and above, sheltered by dorsel curtains of rose red

damask, an oil painting of Jesus Christ on a cross of rough timber. I had put on a coat and wrapped myself in blankets, but even so the chill morning air as it drove into the room made me shiver.

Over the sea I could discern a deep coloured glow, otherwise all was yet night. A mile or so away a high cliff stood up like a monstrous incarnation of dead matter—the jagged edge of its outline actually taking an animal's form, ferocious and lustful. Between it and us a small river wound its way to the sea, and from its low mud flats came the crying of seagulls like maniacs calling for their dead children by the water's edge.

Once, twice, three times, as at another dawn long ago, a cock proclaimed the turning of the earth upon its axis. Strange that the shrill cry of this vain and strutting fowl should be associated more than any other sound with the most solemn hour of our days. Gradually minute after minute the heavy colours on the horizon grew fainter and fainter; like a celestial Venice gleaming fresh and fair in the morning light.

And all the while as I sat watching there was forming in my mind a new conception of Christianity as of something inextricably interwoven with the very elements of the world; with the earth, the sun, and morning star. In comparison with the existence of this divine secret nothing seemed of consequence.

I felt my whole being abandon itself in ecstatic supplication to the resplendent and glorious son of God whose presence at this solemn moment seemed so real and vivid that, in order to remind myself of actual reality, I turned to my companion who for a long time had not spoken.

The oratory was empty. The sun had risen. I crossed over to my room and began dressing.

Presently there was another knock at the door. This time it was the housekeeper.

'Sir!' she cried, 'my master died at midnight. We summoned the doctor but he could do nothing; he is lying in his bedroom. Would you care to see him?' Trembling, I followed her downstairs. There lay the old Priest, wrapped already in what appeared to be his shroud; his arms were crossed, and on his breast lay a tiny effigy of the only Christian who has ever lived.

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# Deborah Wills

## Problems of Ontology and Omnipotence in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*

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'I am the Only Penitent' replied Jar. 'I have come to confess my sin to you.'

'Can I give you absolution?' asked Mr. Hayhoe, in a low tone.

'You can,' replied Jar, 'for only by the forgiveness of man can I be saved . . . He who forgives sin, loves the sinner . . . By love, all is forgiven.'

'Dare I love you?' asked Mr. Hayhoe.

Jar bowed his head.

'I crucified my son,' he said. Mr. Hayhoe was silent. "'Twas I who created every terror in the earth, the rack, the plague, all despair, all torment. I am the one who rips up the woman with child, every foul rape is mine act, all pain and evil are created by me. Can you love me now? . . . I destroy all men with a sword,' said Jar. 'I cast them down into the pit, and they become nothing.'

'Hold!' cried Mr. Hayhoe. 'Is that last word true?'

'It is,' answered Jar.

'Then, in the name of Man,' said Mr. Hayhoe boldly, 'I forgive your sin; I pardon you and deliver you from all your evil; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting death.'

T. F. Powys, ending from *The Only Penitent* (1931)

As a reappropriation of a scriptural text, *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* presupposes recurrence. Centred in the intervention of the sacred into the profane, and thus reflecting the fundamental Judeo-Christian theme as unfolded in the Bible, T. F. Powys's narration establishes a stoppage or suspension of time as the medium in which this intervention occurs. As with its biblical precedents, the suspension of time, as it occurs in *Folly Down*, implies a divine manipulation of the temporal in order to prophecy or to enact judgement; implicit in this time of judgement, however, is the

potential for salvation. Just as Christ's advent, as celebrated in the New Testament, offers man a potential initiation into divine time, Mr. Weston's advent represents a rift in profane time through which the divine may work redemptively. The pattern of recurrence established by this repetition of divine intervention, however, raises seminal questions in Powys's text. Perhaps the most significant of these is the novel's exploration of the concept of divine omnipotence. In examining the spiritually entropic state of the fallen world, *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* prompts a reconsideration of the sustaining nature of the Divine Will.

An examination of this issue demands a close attention to Powys's use of time throughout the novel. An obvious schism exists between what may be characterized as Divine Time and Profane Time. The latter, as a function of the fallen world, exists as a post-lapsarian phenomenon testifying to the moment of man's falling away from God, a moment resulting in the original severing of profane from sacred time. Although profane time assumes objectivity, essentially on the basis of being measurable, this is an assumption which Powys consistently undermines. The normal progression of the seasons is subverted, as is the normal progression of the hours, to which both Landlord Bunce and the Reverend Grobe can attest. Further, evening time is acknowledged to be substantively different from daylight time. Distortion, then, is recognized as a necessary feature of profane time. It becomes evident that, within the framework of fallen time, the potentially redemptive has lost its power. The erotic, which represents one of Powys's greatest opportunities for salvation, is corrupted instead into a means of damnation, as with

Mrs. Vosper and the Squire's sons. The Church, at least to the extent that it represents organized religion, similarly fails; it has become a place where the good wine is sipped, and not drunk to the dregs as Mr. Weston would wish. Even the social environment of the village offers a certain amount of hope, for within Powys's universe the country is always closer to redemption than the city; even here, however, social intercourse, as characterized by the gatherings at the Angel Inn, is reduced to brutality and avarice, and thus tends to isolation rather than to fellowship. It is clear, then, that if salvation is to come to Folly Down, profane time must give way to another medium.

This medium is represented by divine time. Founded in a suspension of the machinations and devices by which profane time is measured (and here Powys gently mocks the naivety of human beings who equate time with clocks, as if the cessation of one implies the cessation of the other), divine time might be characterized as unending time or permanent time; that is, the time in which we assume Paradise and Life Everlasting to occur. Within the structure of the novel, sacred time can intersect with profane time. Events occur in each that have consequences in the other; changes resonate between the two realms.

This intersection, then, represents the moment at which profane time must give way in order for the redemptive element of divine time to function. This moment is a problematic one, however; if the repeated intercession of God into the affairs of man establishes a pattern of recurrence, of which Mr. Weston's most recent advent represents only the latest incident, what does the existence of this pattern imply? Certainly it emphasizes that the fallen world exists in a state of perpetual Fall; spiritual entropy is in effect. As Mr. Weston and Michael reiterate, "All things tend towards their end" (315). This entropy has two implications: first, if the continual necessity for divine intervention asserts, through a pattern of repetition and recurrence, a

circularity of time (in which history becomes a wheel spoked with moments of divine interference) then history can no longer be schematized as a progression towards an ultimate end characterized by the final manifestation of the will of God. History thus has, on the contrary, no single end point and thus no ultimate revelation. Secondly, this aspect of the text suggests a query of the nature of divine omnipotence. Is there, somehow, a failure of the Divine Will to direct and sustain the Creation in its appointed course? Why are these moments of divine intervention necessary? Does their necessity imply a flaw in the creation, or in the Creator? In order to consider these questions, it is necessary to examine more closely the relationship between Creator and creation, and, specifically, the relationship between Mr. Weston and the world as a text which he has originated.

As Mr. Weston stands on the hill overlooking Folly Down, Powys introduces a narrative commentary focussing on the link between the power of creation and the generative capacity of the imagination. Mr. Weston possesses "a poet's fancy, that will at any moment create out of the imagination a new world" (28). The power of this poetic fancy is such that he is continually "very much surprised" to discover that "the very persons and places he had seen in fancy had a real existence in fact" (28). Powys at once suggests both a metaphoric recapitulation of the Genesis creation account (which could in itself be seen as the ultimate metaphor for all art), and a gloss on the seminal scriptural passage of First John, chapter one, which affirms that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1. 1,3).

This specific linking of the Word with creation defines Mr. Weston in his dual capacity of Author of the Book and Author of Life; he is the "Creator" in the world's fullest sense. Thus, not only has Mr. Weston written the world, he is also, through

moments of spiritual intercession, continually re-writing it. As the lines between creation and imagination converge, the boundaries of fact and fancy, the world and the word, become permeable; it becomes conceivable to speculate, for example, that the inhabitants of Folly Down came into existence only as their names are written and read in Mr. Weston's account book, for without the Word "was not anything made that was made."

Even more significant than the fact that Mr. Weston has written the world, however, is the fact that he has both written himself into creation and written himself into the creation. This is evidenced, for example, by the "short chapter" of his book which he recites to Luke Bird, a psalm of praise to the Creator, exalting God both for raising man up and for returning him to the dust.

The concept of Weston's having written himself into being reveals many of Powys's narrative asides concerning Weston's sublime nature as more than simply humorous or even ironic. The remark, for example, that Mr. Weston had "risen from nothing" assumes new resonance when considered in this light. It also puts a new perspective on the hymn by William Cowper to which Powys alludes: God is truly seen as "His own interpreter". Thus God's Word explicates not just His actions, but His very Being.

It is the concept of God's Being which leads to the issue which is at once the most problematic and the most central to the novel. This is, of course, Mr. Weston's desire for release from his own existence. It surfaces repeatedly within the novel: before he even arrives in Folly Down, Mr. Weston confides to Michael that he "would willingly exchange all that [he is] with any simple child that lives and dies in these gentle valleys *and is forgotten*" (209, emphasis mine). He echoes this sentiment in his response to Michael's observation that "on such an evening even the Creator of the Universe could wish to forget himself for a season", replying, "would that He could so forget Himself" (58). And, finally, Mr.

Weston makes his ultimate confession, claiming, "I long to die. I long to drink my own dark wine" (300).

Thus we are faced with Powys's clearest articulation of the problem of omnipotence. The Maker's power to unmake is implicit—what then stops Mr. Weston from fulfilling his own desires? Why does Mr. Weston not write himself out of existence? If he is ultimately trapped in a fiction of his own making, omnipotence is an illusion, foundering on the paradox that God can do anything but fail.

To suggest a resolution to this paradox demands a return to the previous schematization of time as divided into the sacred and the profane. A closer reading of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* seems to imply that this model is inadequate. It is possible, instead, to postulate a third realm of time (although perhaps it would be wiser to speak in terms of "realms of consciousness") conceptualized as Eternity. Even this term, however, is misleading through its associations: it is generally used as synonymous to and interchangeable with such phrases as "Heaven", "Paradise", or "Life Everlasting". Eternity, in contrast; as I would suggest Powys implies, is absolutely beyond, outside of, and apart from time. Not only does it resist temporal schematization, it is completely other than the temporal; it represents oblivion, cessation of consciousness, cessation of soul. Powys hints at this otherness of eternity by pointing to its elusiveness, both as word and as concept. When Old Grunter uses the word to describe the suspension of time, for example, the narrative voice notes that he had not gleaned the term from Luke Bird's eschatological sermons, for Luke "had never told any beast or fowl what the ages would be called when time ended" (140). This remark equally emphasizes the opacity of eternity as a concept, for it is ironically impossible to define it except in terms of "ages", a term which, in relation to eternity, has no meaning.

Eternity, in this specialized sense, can only be understood by those trapped within

profane time in a false and conceptually limited way. This is ironically underscored by the reactions of the revellers at the Inn. When Grunter proclaims "Time be stopped . . . and eternity be begun" (139), Mr. Vosper, in echoing his words, emphasizes the profanity of his grasp of eternity: when Bunce repeats "Time be stopped", Vosper responds, "And real drinking be begun" (201).

Notably, Eternity is not achieved by all who die within the novel; in fact, it is not even achieved by all who drink the "dark wine". Consciousness still persists in Heaven and in Hell, both of which, paradoxically, occur within divine time. Nicholas Grobe's desire is to be reunited with his wife, a reunion which Mr. Weston implies is impending, after Grobe drinks the wine. Mrs. Vosper's death, similarly, implies a continuation of consciousness after death, similarly, even if it is an infernal one. But the Eternal, as used here, cannot co-exist with the Human on any level: a transubstantiation is required. Those who come closest, therefore, to achieving the Eternal are those who have sought oblivion on earth: Ada, who seeks it in the dark waters of the pond, and Tamar, who seeks it in the moment of ecstatic sexual surrender. Significantly, both ascend to the stars, a typical Powysian symbol of transformation to an unknown or beyond-the-human state.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, both their bodies show evidence of the physical proof of their mutation; Ada's transformation is accomplished by worms, Tamar's by lightning, both of which must, in these instances, be seen as supernatural agents.

It is Eternity in this sense which Mr. Weston desires. He already has demonstrated his power over both life and death (through his multiple resurrections) and over both profane and divine time (through his temporal manipulations). Since death as it is generally understood can occur within either divine or human time, it must be a death more profound, more timeless, for which he longs.

As Author of the world, Weston accepts

responsibility for his entire creation. More than this, however, he accepts culpability. As shown in Powys's story *The Only Penitent*, God, in his earthly manifestation, assumes a literal burden of guilt for every wrong committed on His earth. In *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, Weston assumes his scriptural identity as the lamb of God purifying the world of its sins. When Grunter finally relinquishes his role as scape-goat, Mr. Weston is then able to fulfil his function as sacrificial lamb. It is in this that Weston's advent offers a fusion of Old Testament and New Testament that goes far beyond its combined images of the Old Testament creation with the New Testament miracles Weston re-enacts. The fusion centres in the merging of the Old Dispensation with the New Dispensation, a merging that depends on the submersion of the Old Testament emphasis on the individual's need to redeem his own sins through ritual sacrifice and cleansing into the New Testament dispensation of Grace. Grace emphasizes salvation as gift, something freely given and freely received. This emphasis becomes crucial in relation to the word "redemption": it implies not just salvation, but salvation purchased by another, demanding both cost and sacrifice. Just as the original manifestation of Christ on earth represented sacrifice, in the self-determined laying aside of Deity, Mr. Weston's reappearance, as the avatar of Love, represents the sacrifice of Being, of submission to an endless cycle of incarnation and re-incarnation. Mr. Weston consciously denies himself Eternity, in the recognition that when he drinks his own dark wine, all being will cease: "but when I drink my own deadly wine the firm will end . . . [and humanity] will all drink of it too" (228). In this light, the sustenance of Creation becomes a question of Divine Will rather than of Divine Omnipotence; God self-consciously limits or curtails his own power of non-being.<sup>2</sup>

It is, at this point, perhaps justifiable to query the necessity or the ultimate good of continued universal being. Why should the

creation, fixed in its downward spiral, not be allowed to cease existing? Certainly even the apparently simple and cheerful country life of Folly Down is shadowed by the presence of dark and sinister undercurrents informing the lighter reality. Clearly, the post-lapsarian world exists in a state of perpetual fall; that is its nature. The ontological nature of God, in consequence, is circumscribed by a dual obligation to this world which he has generated, an obligation comprising, on the one hand, culpability for the evil that exists on earth, (as expressed most strongly in *The Only Penitent*) and, on the other, the responsibility that comes with Weston's power not only to create, but to re-create, not only to establish order, but to re-establish it; the power to redeem, to resurrect, to restore. It is the responsibility of the artist to his art, of the author to his text, and, quite literally, of the Creator to his creation.

Thus the cyclical pattern of divine intervention is set in motion: a creation in continual decay, a continual progression to damnation, is interrupted by the repeated attempts of the Creator to reverse this entropy. And it is here that Weston's self-sacrifice is justified: for only in his continued existence can even the potential for salvation exist. And the "mysterious ways" of Mr. Weston's workings in Folly Down do do much to move the village in the direction of salvation. Upon his appearance, an imbalance between good and evil begins to

right itself: for every act of brutality there is an act of compassion; for every demonstration of ignorance there is newly acquired knowledge; for every lie, a truth is made manifest. Mrs. Vosper and the Mumbys are brought to justice; Old Grunter renounces both his own sin and that which is committed in his name; and the legendary oak tree, defiled by generations of virgin's blood, is sanctified by Tamar's union with Michael, in a ritual purification by fire. If evil, human or occult, is not entirely vanquished on the earth, at least a movement back towards a balance is prompted, a balance hinted at in the words of the disembodied voice heard at the Angel Inn:

'I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord, do all these things' (154).

As Christ's two earthly advents are paralleled, so are His two passions. In the Garden of Gethsemene, Christ prayed that God would take from him the bitter cup of the crucifixion. Mr. Weston's bitter cup, in contrast, becomes abstinence from his own wine, and, instead, submission to a self-instituted cycle of incarnation that presupposes continuity. Mr. Weston's disappearance in a cloud of smoke thus fittingly recalls the pillar of smoke in which the God of the Old Testament ranged the earth, suggesting a movement to yet another incarnation, yet another manifestation of God made flesh.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Page references throughout are to *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (1927), London: The Hogarth Press, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>John Williams, in his article "All Good Books Tell the Same Tale" (*The Powys Review*, No. 10), also makes reference to the stars as being representative of the Other, although he does not discuss this in specific relation to Tamar and Ada.

<sup>3</sup>It is perhaps in this sense that we can see Mr. Weston's incarnation of the Trinity as including Father, Son, and a Nietzschean Holy Ghost, the Ghost of a God that longs for, but is not permitted, death.



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# Penny Smith

## Hilda Doolittle and Frances Gregg

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A young woman with hyacinth-blue eyes—each time they took on a new depth of colour it was a revelation: Hilda Doolittle's fascination with Frances Gregg would continue throughout her life. When they first met in Philadelphia in 1909 Frances was twenty-five and Hilda two years younger. The daughter of an eminent professor, Hilda herself had had to leave Bryn Mawr because of poor marks during her sophomore year; she had briefly been engaged to the incorrigible young Ezra Pound, only to have him break it off; she was very unsure what to do with her life.



Frances Gregg.

The embattled Frances immediately filled an emotional void and H.D.'s autobiographical novel, *Her*,<sup>1</sup> (written 1927) explores the early, most intense stage of their relationship: Her, (Hermione, based on Hilda), is struck down by a girl whose "wild eyes . . . were the only sane eyes . . . that Hermione had yet seen" (58-9). At a Philadelphia tea party Fayne Rabb, (modelled on Frances Gregg), is wonderfully out of place: "'What about Dostoevski?'" she asks (58). Marvellous—Her knows nothing about Dostoevski and the mysterious, all-knowing Fayne makes an immediate conquest.

*Her* is a beautifully-written, lyrical account of a young woman's early loves and growing sexual awareness. Ahead of its time its modernism pushes towards the post-modernist and feminist fictions we are more familiar with today—which may be one reason why it was not published until 1981, over fifty years after it was written and twenty years after H.D.'s death.

In *Her*, Fayne sweeps all before herself and Hermione. Her's engagement to George Lowndes, (based on Ezra Pound), disintegrates without Her really noticing: it is the blue-eyed girl who is now the most important force in her life. "Across the table, with its back to the little slightly convex mirror, facing Her . . . was this thing that made the floor sink beneath her feet and the wall rise to infinity above her head." (52) ". . . this thing called Fayne Rabb . . . Her gasped out 'What is it, what is it Fayne Rabb does to people?'" (185)

Three years after meeting Hilda, Frances was having much the same effect on John Cowper Powys. Frances had attended Powys's lectures, taking H.D. and Pound with her, and in "The Letters of Frances and

Jack", Oliver Marlow Wilkinson tells how she eventually approached with one of her poems and how the poem, and its young author, entered Powys's imagination.<sup>2</sup> 'Jack's' letters show he was madly in love. Almost straight away he was visiting Frances at her mother's home, writing her impassioned love-letters, and there is little doubt he would have married her—if he hadn't already been married. As it was he had a wife, so he achieved the next best thing and arranged for Frances to marry one of his closest friends, Louis Wilkinson. The three of them, along with Powys's sister, Marian, then set off for England together.

What could they have been thinking of? They probably didn't know themselves: it was to be a great bohemian adventure. The newlyweds, who had met only a few weeks earlier, had agreed not to consummate the marriage for a year;<sup>3</sup> all the same Powys, the matchmaker, was tortured with jealousy. Frances herself doesn't seem to have suffered any such pangs; she was beautiful and powerful, and, so it must have seemed at the time, suddenly free to live her life exactly as she chose.

The adventure continued across Europe. Frances, Jack and Louis had crossed an ocean together; they had defied convention, middle-class morality, all the respectable norms. In Venice Frances further delighted her men by crossing a sexual barrier as well and dressing as a boy—Powys later described the resulting confrontation with the local authorities in his *Autobiography* (1934).<sup>4</sup>

Hilda Doolittle missed out on the excitement of being arrested for cross-dressing in Venice. In 1912 she was living in London, where she had remained after arriving the year before on a holiday with Frances and Frances's mother. Frances had had to return to America but Hilda's father had been able to provide an allowance which enabled her to stay on. "[N]oone will ever love you as I loved you", one of Hilda's letters assures her friend;<sup>5</sup> but as Barbara Guest observes in her excellent biography, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World*, Hilda

decided in London that whereas "she had been 'taken up' . . . Frances was too impetuous and forthright for the British. Despite her secretly sworn love for Frances, she was relieved when the Greggs decided to return home."<sup>6</sup>

Guest paints a sensitive picture of the relationship between Frances and H.D., emphasizing the importance of Frances in H.D.'s imaginative life.<sup>7</sup> Hilda demanded, Guest says, "a kind of emotional subjugation and idealized relationship from her first deep love, Frances Gregg, while at the same time Frances would be exposed to the most candid criticism and arbitrary desertion."<sup>8</sup> In 1911 Hilda was quite happy for Frances to be out of the picture, leaving her as the talented young American poet in London, closely associated with Pound and the birth of Imagism. In 1912, however, Frances announced she would shortly be back on the scene. "'Wee witches grow up'":<sup>9</sup> she had married an extension lecturer and hoped Hilda would be able to accompany them on their European trip. Guest says that although Hilda at first felt her friend had thrown herself away, her feelings changed completely on meeting the couple off the boat: the handsome Louis was well-known, with well-connected, elegant friends. "Frances had triumphed over her."<sup>10</sup>

Piqued or not, Hilda agreed to accompany Frances's entourage—only to be stopped melodramatically at the last minute. In *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound* (written 1958, pub. 1979), H.D. describes how Pound bundled her into a taxi: "'You are not going with them,'" Ezra's motivation is left vague; it is suggested he felt Frances and Louis's marriage might work out but having Hilda along would "'spoil everything.'"<sup>11</sup> The newlywed couple should be left alone. Although, of course, they were not alone at all, and the version of events in the unpublished, "Paint it Today", puts things in a different perspective. Here, Raymond, (Pound), explains that Josepha, (Frances—Josepha was Frances's second name), is not in love with

her husband and has married him simply in order to travel. She is really in love with her husband's friend, an 'Irish dramatist', and Midget, (Hilda), has only been invited along as a sort of chaperone. The dominant feeling is one of betrayal. "Paint it Today" makes it clear that Midget's relationship with Josepha colours her whole life; however Josepha not only deceives her about her marriage and her reasons for wanting Midget's company, but then adds insult to injury by writing letters to Raymond and not to her. Later she does write to Midget, saying that in the past she had told her nothing but lies: theirs is an impossible love.<sup>12</sup>

Another unpublished piece, "Asphodel", has a similar scene. Fayne has sent Hermione a letter which 'burns': which announces her marriage. It is George, however, who has been told the real truth, that Fayne is not in love with her husband Maurice, (Louis Wilkinson), but with the lecturer John Llewyn (John Cowper Powys—who George describes as a scathing, lavender-gloved Browning). Maurice is playing the complacent husband and, George tells Hermione she is not to go with them.<sup>13</sup>

The Pound figure obviously disapproves of this arranged marriage and does not seem at all keen on 'John Llewyn' either. The dislike may well have had its source in fact—Pound's letters to Frances Gregg make it clear he had little affection for "Jesus C. Powys"<sup>14</sup> and Frances herself suspected that Powys had put his manager, Arnold Shaw, off taking Pound on as a lecturer: "My disappointment in Jack goes very deep" she wrote to her mother.<sup>15</sup> Ezra was one of the two "fixed points" in the compass of her affections,<sup>16</sup> but it is hard to tell whether she had been as deeply involved with him as *Her* suggests: in the novel Fayne secretly starts seeing George, and Hermione's life dissolves into illness and breakdown, (although at the end Fayne will be waiting for her).<sup>17</sup>

Barbara Guest stresses that, especially in

later years, Frances's courageous and compassionate letters offered Hilda a great deal of support; but in this earlier period Frances's feelings about Hilda were ambivalent, as a letter written to Julia Gregg in 1913 makes clear. Frances has just been introduced to Powys's estranged wife, Margaret:

. . . I hated her! She was so like Hilda! She used to look at Jack across the table, with her eyelids half dropped and that expression of veiled resentment with which Hilda used so much to look at Ezra,—that resentment that is based in unsatisfied sexual desire.<sup>18</sup>

The second 'fixed point' in Frances's emotional compass was a woman—not Hilda, however, but Amy Hoyt:<sup>19</sup> Hilda was no longer at the centre of Frances's affections and may very well have felt betrayed. And if she didn't feel this way in 1913 she was given good reason to feel so three years later when Frances and Louis's novel, *The Buffoon*,<sup>20</sup> was published.

In the Introduction to H. D.'s *Bid Me To Live*, Helen McNeil lists control, revenge, "and the temptation of the ready-made character" as "the usual motives for writing a *roman-à-clef*."<sup>21</sup> H.D., always the professional, seems to have largely avoided the desire for revenge—Frances and Louis, however, did not. *The Buffoon* is a cruel book, and McNeil's further observation, that in "a suspicious number of cases the character *à-clef* is one of powerful psychic hold, an unresolved object of passionate desire or of that very similar emotion, hatred,"<sup>22</sup> is particularly apt here. As Eunice Dinwiddie and Raoul Root, Hilda and Pound<sup>23</sup> are portrayed as superficial, calculating *poseurs*; in comparison with Powys, however, they come off lightly. Edward Raynes, (Louis), eventually realizes he is the real buffoon—a moment of recognition which does nothing to make up for the way Powys, as Jack Welsh, is ruthlessly lampooned. It is a mean book, pretending not to be. It is also a book frightening in the intensity of the emotions behind it: Jack Welsh finally dies on the operating table.

*The Buffoon* could easily have done serious damage to the careers and reputations of its victims, and it was probably no coincidence that after its publication Powys suffered a period of profound depression.

H.D. must have felt similarly injured. The war witnessed a turn in her fortunes: her brother was killed in the fighting; she had a miscarriage; her marriage to Richard Aldington collapsed; a love-affair failed. In 1918, however, a figure entered her life who was to change it forever: the wealthy Annie Winifred Ellerman, known as Bryher, would take it on herself to make sure that H.D. never had to be alone or want for anything again.

“How these people did carry on”:<sup>24</sup> although H.D.’s daughter, Perdita Schaffner, was brought up in the midst of it all she observes that in comparison with the emotional complexities of Bloomsbury, and H.D. and Bryher’s circle, her own life in the 1980s seems “very ordinary”.<sup>25</sup> Frances and Louis’s arranged marriage was only the first of a number of unlikely liaisons, and the high-jinks of the Venice honeymoon pale beside H.D.’s later domestic arrangements.

(Frances) Perdita was born in 1919 and named after her mother’s first love. The first part of her name was dropped, however, and in the Afterword to *Her* she recalls sitting under a table as a child and hearing Bryher say: “‘Don’t mention Frances Gregg, ever again. She is very dangerous’ . . . Bryher’s edict was enforced. Frances Gregg was never mentioned again.”<sup>26</sup> But Frances didn’t disappear from Hilda’s view; the typescript of *Bid Me to Live* was dedicated to her, (“To F . . . September 2. To Frances on her birthday.”),<sup>27</sup> and Barbara Guest describes how, in 1926, Frances brought someone else into H.D.’s life—the young Kenneth Macpherson.<sup>28</sup> According to Oliver Marlow Wilkinson, Frances had met the twenty-two-year-old Kenneth in 1924. She loved him, and he loved her, but two years later she introduced him to her old friend and: “he fell in love with Hilda. This must have been ironic; and I imagine, a

bitter result of Frances’s efforts to awaken Kenneth Macpherson’s imagination and talent and further his career . . .”<sup>29</sup>

Bitter indeed. Hilda had everything: Bryher to support and care for her; the time and space in which to build a literary reputation. Frances too was highly talented, but there was no adoring benefactress to look after her; instead she had two children and her mother to support. The marriage with Louis had, (inevitably), gone terribly wrong, and Frances’s hopes of building a real career as a writer succumbed to the battle of sheer survival.

Hilda, on the other hand, could afford to indulge both herself and Kenneth. She couldn’t marry him as she was still married to Aldington; so, just as fifteen years earlier the young Frances had married Louis, the even younger Macpherson now married Hilda’s best friend, Bryher. H. D.’s relationship would eventually end and she would go on to other relationships. But through them all Frances would remain of great importance to her—although her letters had to be kept well out of Bryher’s sight.<sup>30</sup>

Remembering H.D., Silvia Dobson describes how Frances Gregg was to her “an ‘off-stage’ character”, Hilda’s “first woman lover”:

Frances joined other femmes fatales on my homospiritual cult list:—La Belle Dame sans Merci, Jezebel, Boudicia, Joan of Arc, Sappho, Colette, Rosa Bonheur, countless mythic goddesses. Yet I had to acknowledge that both H.D. and Frances were bi-sexual, that men as well as Gods ‘turned them on’.<sup>31</sup>

While women probably played the most important part in H.D.’s emotional life, Frances seems to have been drawn more strongly to men, and twenty-five years after first meeting Powys was eagerly looking forward to his return to England. Guest says that in a letter to H.D. in 1934 Frances confesses that it is Powys “whom she has been pursuing ‘literally yowling down all these many years.’ After five years he has

returned to her, saying he enjoys being with her, despite their quarrels. She calls him 'the great man'.<sup>32</sup>

What could this be about? Frances and Powys had tried to live together in 1919, but the experiment had not proved a success;<sup>33</sup> since 1921 Powys had been living, very happily, with Phyllis Playter and it was with Phyllis that he was returning home. Possibly Frances was trying to convince Hilda that everything had worked out after all—that the great adventure was to have a triumphant end. She was certainly aware that in Hilda's eyes she had failed. In *Her*, Hermione realizes she has "a double burden . . . run, run Hermione, run for yourself and Fayne Rabb . . . Fayne will not reach out, will not accept her greatness." (200) Fayne, 'her', is the other side of Her(self). "There were two of everybody (except myself) in the first house on Church Street" Hilda remembered:<sup>34</sup> Frances had stepped forward as the desired sister, the other self.

In "Asphodel" the young Hermione is aware that both she and Fayne Rabb are in danger: Joan of Arc, a girl who was also a

boy, had been caught, broken, hurt. Such girls, who have visions, are in danger of being crushed like flowers. Watching Frances later in life H.D.'s premonitions were justified, she saw just how dangerous it all was; how risky the business of attempting to leap barriers could be. Unlike Powys she shied away from the disorder and hardship of Frances's life; but she did not fail to acknowledge Frances's importance in, and to, her writing. In *Tribute to Freud* (written 1948, pub. 1956), she describes how when very young she had had a significant dream about a carved snake and a thistle. Ezra later attempted to analyse this dream; but it was with Frances, in 1911, that she first visited the Louvre and saw a ring with the same motif.<sup>35</sup> It was under the influence of Frances, a woman, that dreams and visions became real.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Belinda Mackay for calling my attention to the relationship between H.D. and Frances Gregg. I also owe thanks to Oliver Marlow Wilkinson, who, some years ago, very kindly talked to me about his mother and H.D.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Her* (in United States, *HERmione*, 1981) London: Virago, 1984. References within the text are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> "The Letters of Frances and Jack", *The Powys Review*, No. 19 (1986), p. 44. See also, Oliver Marlow Wilkinson, "John Cowper Powys in Love", *The Powys Review*, No. 2 (Winter 1977), pp. 61-66.

<sup>3</sup> "Letters of Frances and Jack", p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography* (1934), London: Macdonald, 1967, pp. 405-06.

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World*, London: Collins, 1984, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> See also Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, "Chapter 2, H.D.'s triangles", *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940*, London: Women's Press, 1987, pp. 14-32.

<sup>8</sup> *Herself Defined*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> As quoted in *Herself Defined*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound*, Manchester: Carcanet, 1979, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>12</sup> "Paint it Today", unpub. TS, 1921, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. In *Herself Defined* Guest slightly confuses the issue when she says: "Frances was really in love with Llewelyn Powys, whose brother John Cowper Powys was in love with her." (p. 37) In such a detailed work this is an understandable confusion; overall, *Herself Defined* is impressively researched and highly readable.

<sup>13</sup> "Asphodel", unpub. TS, 1921, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>14</sup> Letter 3 December 1912. In possession of Oliver Marlow Wilkinson.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Julia Gregg, 30 September 1913. In possession of Oliver Marlow Wilkinson.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Julia Gregg, [August] 1913. In possession of Oliver Marlow Wilkinson.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver Marlow Wilkinson quotes Frances as writing: "We were two girls in love with one another,

and in love with the same man.' ” He explains that the man was Ezra. “Letters of Frances and Jack”, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup>Letter 18 August 1913. In possession of Oliver Marlow Wilkinson.

<sup>19</sup>Op. cit., letter to Julia Gregg, [August] 1913.

<sup>20</sup>Louis U. Wilkinson, *The Buffoon*, London: Constable, 1916.

<sup>21</sup>Helen McNeil, (new) Introd., *Bid Me to Live*, by H.D. (1960), London: Virago, 1984, p. ix.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. x.

<sup>23</sup>Pound wrote to Frances to say he thought *The Buffoon* a damnably bad book. He also says he skipped the sections on Powys as he just couldn't get up enough interest . . . Letter, [n.d.]. In possession of Oliver Marlow Wilkinson.

<sup>24</sup>Perdita Schaffner, Afterword, *Bid Me to Live*, p. 185.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Perdita Schaffner, Afterword, *Her*, pp. 236-37.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>28</sup>*Herself Defined*, p. 179.

<sup>29</sup>As quoted *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>31</sup>“beseiged with memories . . .”: Remembering H.D., *Agenda*, H.D. Special Issue, 25, Nos. 3-4 (Autumn/Winter 1987/8), p. 127.

<sup>32</sup>*Herself Defined*, p. 229.

<sup>33</sup>See Oliver Marlow Wilkinson, “A Rival to Jack”, *Recollections of the Brothers Powys*, ed. Belinda Humfrey, London: Peter Owen, 1980, pp. 180-87.

<sup>34</sup>*Tribute to Freud*, rev. ed. (1956), Manchester: Carcanet, 1985, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

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## Kenneth Hopkins: an Obituary and a Memoir

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Kenneth Hopkins: frontispiece to *The Corruption of a Poet* (James Barrie, 1954).

There were several apt newspaper obituaries on Kenneth Hopkins who died, too soon, on 1 April 1988. Glen Cavaliero's (quoted entire in the PSNA's *Powys Notes*, Spring 1988) ended very rightly: "he was, as his autobiography, *The Corruption of a Poet* (1954) makes clear, a man of singular charm, modesty and wit." Not least was an extensive account of Kenneth Hopkins by the 30 years *Guardian* man, Christopher Driver (author of *The Exploding University* (1971) and *The British at Table 1940-1980* (1983) and owner of a Dorset antiquarian bookshop). On the basis of reading a variety of KH's books and chatting to Anthony Rota, Christopher Driver achieved an acute portrait of the poet and critic, concentrating on his literary energy, creative humour and wit: this he began appropriately by quoting his poem, "Love among the Ruins: New Style" (1944) (*The Guardian*, 12 April 1988).

That rare creature, the real humorist (and parodist) is difficult to describe (and may be sorely missed) because he is likely to be a man of passion and deep human sympathy. Here we reprint the staid obituary by Kenneth Hopkins's friend, Anthony Rota: it appeared in *The Independent*.

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KENNETH HOPKINS, poet and man of letters, was the author of some 60 books and pamphlets and he edited, published and contributed to many more.

He was born in Bournemouth in 1914. His mother ran a small grocer's shop while his father conducted a shoe-repairing business in the room behind. Hopkins left school at 14 and was apprenticed to a builder's merchant and wholesale ironmonger. By the age of 16 his love of literature had already asserted itself: he had assem-

bled no small number of second-hand books and was starting to write poetry.

By 1938 he had had enough of ironmongery and, like W. H. Davies before him, he set out to tramp the country, knapsack on his back, selling his poems from door to door. His first book was *Twelve Poems*, published in wrappers made of wallpaper in an edition of 99 copies in 1937. Not surprisingly, the poetry sales offered no secure livelihood.

In 1938 Hopkins made his way to London where he came within the ambit of Charles Lahr and the *New Coterie* circle at Lahr's Red Lion Street bookshop. He already knew John Cowper Powys, who was to be such an influence in his life; in Lahr's shop he met H. E. Bates, James Hanley, Gerald Kersh and many other writers of the period.

In 1939 he married Betty Coward, the subject of many of his finest lyric poems, notably in the collection *Love And Elizabeth* (1944). Shortly afterwards he joined the army and was posted to a mobile laundry unit, an employment in which he took a certain sardonic amusement. After the war he served for a time as literary editor of *Everybody's*. His light-hearted autobiography *The Corruption of a Poet* was published in 1954. Later he lectured on English literature and taught creative writing at various North American universities, notably the University of Texas, where most of his manuscripts are preserved. His extensive library of English poetry is at the University of Tulsa.

In addition to his poetry, Hopkins will be remembered for his critical studies *The Poets Laureate* (1954) and *Portraits in Satire* (1958). His lifelong championship of the cause of the Powys brothers, John Cowper, Llewelyn and Theodore, reached its apogee with his "biographical appreciation", *The Powys Brothers*, in 1967. In a lighter vein Hopkins wrote detective stories under his own name and under the pseudonym "Christopher Adams". As "Edmund Marshall" he wrote children's books; as "Anton Burney" he even wrote a popular life of Liberace. Hopkins had a happy knack for parody, and published pastiche of work by Emily Dickinson and Samuel Butler as well as claiming to have "discovered" more epigrams by Martial.

In the 1940s as The Grasshopper Press (and latterly as Warren House Press), Hopkins published books which more commercially minded houses could find no room for. He tirelessly advanced the cause of such members of the

Powys circle as Louis Wilkinson (Louis Marlow), Gamel Woolsey and Rex Hunter.

A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a pillar of the Powys Society, he was for many years a regular reviewer for the *Eastern Daily Press*.

ANTHONY ROTA

#### KENNETH HOPKINS:

##### An American's Personal Memoir

To get to North Walsham, where Kenneth Hopkins lived, you took a two car PAYE train from Norwich. The train had a sway and rhythm quite unlike any main line express. When you reached North Walsham you walked into town, passing the Paston Grammar School where Lord Nelson had been a student. When you reached 12 New Road, you found a house partly hidden by trees. The front door had obviously not been used in many years. You entered through a passageway that lead you to the kitchen, and you soon learned that the house did not really face the road but looked out at a rather unkempt garden, and provided the sounds of the railroad.

Kenneth loved trains. He loved women—wife Betty first of all. He loved books and learning. Most of all he just loved living, though maybe with Betty's death last year it was just too hard to go on. It was difficult to tell what his feelings for the Powyses were. I think maybe it was intrigue or curiosity more than love. He was like the maiden aunt or second cousin who lived in the back room and kept track of the births, marriages and deaths in the family. Kenneth had a wonderful sense of humour. The rather odd ball unconventional Powys clan appealed to him.

But Kenneth was never limited by the Powyses. His breadth of knowledge, his reading, his library, all bespoke a wide ranging interest. As a librarian, I am always interested in the person who, driven by the thirst to know, by reading any person contact, becomes a truly educated person. Kenneth, as you may remember, finished his formal schooling at the age of fourteen. He never said much about it but I felt he received a sort of secret pleasure from the fact that he had become an authority, that he was asked by universities and learned bodies to teach or lecture.

That knowledge was not limited to literature. On the last visit my wife and I had with him two

years ago, we spent several afternoons touring the back roads of the eastern part of Norfolk looking at old country churches. Each had something special to offer—a coloured boss, a fine brass, a high carved pulpit. One even had a framed letter from A. R. Powys concerning the restoration of the church. Kenneth had a good background in architecture and he knew his local history. I presume that when he lived on the Isle of White his knowledge of that delightful place was as extensive.

Kenneth wrote, enjoyably I think, in many fields—at least one children’s book, detective novels, biography, literary history. In recent years we’ve tended to forget that he was first of all a poet. While his *The Powys Brothers* will remain the basic book on the Powys family, it is his poetry that will keep his memory alive for me. In reading it today, I hear his joy, his humour, his comments on life. May it ever be so.

BRUCE M. BROWN

# 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 **£10.00** (U.K.) and **£12.00** (abroad).

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*Oscar Wilde,*  
RICHARD ELLMANN.

Hamish Hamilton, 1987, £15.00.

It wasn't so much his blue china that Wilde couldn't live up to but his mother, as outrageous in dress and manner, as lively in her wit and as preposterous in her behaviour. Lady Wilde, who took the name of Speranza, was a poet and translator, eloquent in support of Ireland, outspoken but tolerant, even of Sir William Wilde's sexual peccadilloes. "I really took no interest in the matter" was her Lady Bracknell-like dismissal of his misdemeanours. Not that Sir William wasn't a remarkable and distinguished man, a famous eye surgeon, and also a notable antiquarian and authority on Irish folklore, publishing books on these topics as well as medical studies. Lady Wilde's literary soirées in their fashionable Merrion Square home in Dublin, the unconventional life styles, their happy marriage, were a challenge and example from Oscar's earliest years. Certainly the English society whose dinner-tables Wilde later came to delight and dominate were provincial and conservative compared with Dublin. His Irish background provides the vivid opening to Richard Ellmann's literary biography, but the late nineteenth-century worlds of Oxford, London, Paris and America unfold before our wondering eyes with exact detail in the dramatic sweep of Ellmann's narrative. Though the scholarship is unrivalled it is Ellmann's fusion of narrative and critical comment that distinguishes the writing; for he provides a chronological account of Wilde's works within the spellbinding, tragic and gay—in old and new senses of the word—story of Wilde's rise and fall. Though we know the dénouement it reads as one of the great tales of English literature, for such it is; and as the seamless fabric of events, places, and people compels our attention it has the suspense and drama of theatre, so fascinating are the characters, so intense the passions, so seemingly inexorable the plot. If the principal characters are Oscar, Lady Wilde, Constance, Robbie Ross, Lord Alfred and his father the Marquis of Queensberry, then Whistler, Shaw, Walt Whitman, Lilly Langtry, Mallarmé, Yeats and Carson are but some of the

other scene-stealers. And throughout the drama of these over five hundred pages Wilde's wit stuns, silenced only during the first eighteen months of his two-year imprisonment. Sectional epigraphs aptly signal each episode in this meticulously structured book, and throughout Wilde's witty observations and ripostes lace Ellmann's narrative. They may be a lightning flash into the darker plight of the human condition or quicksilver comment on passing follies, pleasant or unpleasant as the case might be, not least Wilde's own.

If Wilde surprised Oxford, he bedazzled America and finally charmed London society, though not without the hostility of the less talented, stuffily conventional and aggressively philistine—but these were but further stimulus to his challenging wit and fearless, if sometimes feckless, iconoclasm. He was a conviction mocker of the hypocrisies of his times, and a serious jester. As Ellmann so rightly says of *The Importance of Being Earnest*: "Amusing as the surface is, the comic energy springs from the realities that are mocked." Incidentally, a fourth act was excluded late in rehearsals, and surprisingly it is still seldom performed though its wit and style equal the other three. Though Wilde's earlier aesthetic pose, with which he fascinated America, tended to antinomianism, as did his critical themes on the relationship between art and life in *Intentions*, his wit as social comment did not. Beneath the mask of comedy it provided ironic insight into our habits and received responses, as well as public morality, and was amusingly hostile to the hypocritical and self-righteous in Victorian society. Ellmann demonstrates how the subversiveness of Wilde's views is matched by the grace of their expression. What Ellmann establishes, too, is Wilde's seriousness as an artist, and notably how the debate between possibilities informs his best work, that perception of paradox in human experience on which his ironic comedy turns. In this he was in advance of his age, as he was in his socialism, what would now be called his feminism, and his later indictment of Victorian prison conditions. His "Soul of Man Under Socialism" remains relevant today, particularly in its ironic comment on charitable alleviation for the poor and destitute rather than social reform.

It was with his extraordinary gift as a storyteller, often of Biblical tales and characters, but with his customary subversive climax, reversing the usual moral text, that Wilde charmed his listeners, whether fashionable dinner parties or the company of talented young men. It was Yeats who observed that Wilde was the only person he ever heard speak spontaneously in perfectly polished sentences; and monologue as much as witty exchange was a favourite Wildean form. To the end he told these tales, though the ironies of betrayal and suffering rather than pleasure became their theme. Wilde had always delighted in the company of young men, especially those with literary interests, and his friends included the poet John Gray, Lionel Johnson, André Gide, Richard Le Gallienne, Pierre Louÿs, and Raffalovich—so ugly it was said his mother despatched him from Paris to London because she couldn't bear to look at him! The more perilous companions came later. It was conversations with Robert Ross that led to "The Decay of Lying", the proofs of which Wilde read to the young Yeats after Christmas dinner in 1888—a crucial revelation for Yeats regarding the idea of the invention of the self and the importance of symbol.

As Wilde had anticipated, marriage brought immediate respectability, though it had never been his ideal any more than his mother's. Nevertheless, it widened his dinner-party invitations, including from those who had looked at him askance before. It was to be the loss of his role in society as wit and talker that helped destroy him in exile, snubbed, even by inferiors who had lionized him, and cut off from the arena of his inspiration. We learn it was in the third year of his marriage, and at thirty-two comparatively late in his life, that Wilde was seduced by Robbie Ross, soon to become an undergraduate at King's College, Cambridge. He proved the most loyal friend and disciple. But it was Wilde's Damascus, changing not only his sexual life, but his life as a writer. Homosexuality fired his mind, declares Ellmann, and was a major stage of self-discovery and self-realization. His dramatic themes became the moral ambivalence of character, whether of ideal husbands or women with a past, the self-deceptions of being earnest, the ambiguity of conduct. If Wilde's reputation as an author began with *The Happy Prince and other Tales* (1888), Wilde's nineties began in 1889, and ended with his arrest in 1895. 1891, his *annus mirabilis*, saw the publication of four books (two volumes of stories, one of critical

essays, and a novel) and his political essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism", and he wrote his first successful play *Lady Windermere's Fan* and most of *Salomé*. Indolence was certainly a pose. Ellmann brilliantly analyses the composition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, expounding its exploration and critique of aestheticism, and pointing the relationship between life and art in his succinct comment that "Dorian was one of two portraits he would write of a man in decay, the other being the professed self-portrait in *De Profundis*." Certainly publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* saw Wilde's fame, not to say notoriety, acclaimed. Speranza was delighted.

So, alas, was Lord Alfred Douglas, he of the pallid face and blond hair, more beautiful than John Gray, and even less talented, Ellmann tartly informs us. Douglas claimed to have read *Dorian Gray* nine times on the run and sought out Wilde through Lionel Johnson. So began the fatal love affair. Bosie's entry is the climax of the tale, spring of the terrible unfolding of events, a suggestion of doom and inevitability about it all, Oscar at the centre but not the only victim. Bosie, unbalanced and hysterical son of "the screaming, scarlet Marquis", as Wilde dubbed his violent father, provided Wilde with the grand passion of his life that would destroy him. He tried to break off with Bosie more than once, worn out by his rages, his vicious letters, his extravagance. But Bosie wouldn't have it, and even Constance innocently abetted one reconciliation. That Wilde should keep the by no means hard-up aristocrat Bosie demanded as a test of love and loyalty, since sexual loyalty neither desired. Two things have always puzzled me about Wilde's downfall: why did he take the ruthless and litigious Queensberry to court, knowing he was guilty, if not of sodomy, then certainly of other severely punishable homosexual activities? Ellmann makes clear that it was Bosie who drove him despite wiser counsels from such friends as Shaw and Frank Harris, using Wilde to be revenged on his father. It was Wilde's supreme folly, and he fell like Lucifer.

Only during the tribulations of imprisonment did Wilde come to recognize his foolishness, the scales at last lifted from his eyes in the long letter *De Profundis* written to Lord Alfred while in Reading Gaol. As might be expected, it was Lord Alfred who had introduced Wilde to male prostitutes, whose evidence was to convict him, what Ellmann calls "rough trade" and Wilde "feasting with panthers". Secondly, why did Wilde

linger at the Cadogan Hotel when he knew arrest was imminent following Queensberry's acquittal on Wilde's charge of libel, rather than flee to France? Clearly it was the fashionable thing to do, since Ellmann relates the comment that six hundred gentlemen had caught the ferry from Dover to Calais on a night when normally only sixty would have done so. Fatefully, too, Bosie's elder brother, possibly involved in a homosexual relationship with Lord Rosebery, had recently committed suicide. Ellmann suggests that finally Wilde's instinct was that of an Irish gentleman, ready to face the music, and certainly he had never lacked courage. This was his mother's wish also, perhaps more principled than practical. Maybe, too, as Ellmann hints, now that the cards were on the table, and despite a losing hand, he preferred the role of great writer doomed by fate and unjust laws, evident in his eloquent courtroom defence of the "Love that dare not speak its name" and its distinguished and sometimes tragic history. He had earlier signalled the no doubt coded comic cry in *The Importance of Being Earnest* "Why should there be one law for men, and another for women?" It was a sacrificial, if heroic choice. His home was ransacked, his books reviled, his plays removed from the stage, philistinism triumphant in press and public self-approval.

It is another of Ellmann's achievements that the piteous two years in gaol with hard labour, and the remaining four years of bitter exile, are depicted in a narrative equally compelling and with an understanding equally wise. The last and bitter literary fruits, *De Profundis* and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" cast their perspectives, as does Wilde's wit, which like his extravagance, and the habits for which he was arraigned, defiantly remained. There were intermittent reunions with the abominable Bosie, still making scenes, still sponging, but it was a miserable end. Yet Wilde outlived his mother, brother and wife, false friends like Beardsley and true ones like Dowson, even his enemy Queensberry.

Sadly Richard Ellmann, having spent thirty years researching and writing this magisterial work, died six months before its acclaimed publication. These are his closing words:

His work survived as he claimed it would. We inherit his struggle to achieve supreme fictions in art, to associate art with social change, to bring together individual and social impulse, to save what is eccentric and singular from being sanitized and standard-

ized, to replace a morality of severity by one of sympathy. He belongs to our world more than to Victoria's. Now, beyond the reach of scandal, his best writings validated by time, he comes before us still, a towering figure, laughing and weeping, with parables and paradoxes, so generous, so amusing, and so right.

Ironically apt comment, indeed, when a hundred years later the dogs of intolerance bark again.

JOHN ACKERMAN

*Tarzan of Athens: A Biographical Study of G. Wilson Knight,*

JOHN E. VAN DOMELEN.

Redcliffe Press, 1987, £8.95.

Professor Van Domelen's biographical study of G. Wilson Knight is a puzzling work, for one wonders who, even among admirers of Wilson Knight's literary criticism, is going to read it. In addition, the biography incorporates a critical appraisal of Wilson Knight's literary theory—the "interpretative analysis" which is developed in a remarkable series of Shakespearean criticism from *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) to *The Crown of Life* (1947), but one is never quite sure whether the writer regards this literary theory as valid, or whether he is in fact treating us to a subtle exercise in send-up. Part of the problem lies in the author's style of writing which is often unclear. The text is full of non-sequiturs, bathos and unhappy grammatical constructions which is not at all helped by a catalogue of misprints which seem to occur frequently at crucial points in the text (for example in the quotation from *Hamlet*, p. 122).

The questions that arise are fairly fundamental: first, whether Wilson Knight's life story was sufficiently interesting, revealing or material to the development of his criticism as to render a biography necessary *per se*; and second, whether Wilson Knight's literary theory needs this kind of treatment, when we have, as it were, the life's work to hand. Of the first, I would say perhaps not. Knight's dutiful relationship with his mother, his days at Oxford (uninfluenced by the Harold Acton circle), his apparently non-existent sexuality, his conscientious school-mastering at Cheltenham and Stowe, his distinguished but uneventful years as a university

lecturer on both sides of the Atlantic, and his quite reasonable struggles with publishers, do not seem to be proven to have any necessary connection with the cerebral and imaginative construction of the interpretative theory which informs his work. Obviously as an actor-*manqué* he was concerned largely with the dramatic structure—and with the dramatic *truth*—of Shakespeare, and clearly the strength of his mother's personality emerges in characters such as that of Mrs Rainsford in the novel *Klinton Top*, but this kind of migration of influence is natural and implicit and ultimately unrevealed by the kind of dove-tailing of biography and criticism which is given here.

Of the second reservation—whether Wilson Knight's work can usefully be understood in the context of a work of critical appraisal, I would say yes, but not quite in this way nor at this length. The author devotes three chapters wholly to the works with many repetitions of statements and conclusions scattered throughout, but we never emerge with a clear idea of the author's stance nor with an idea as to how this work slots into the world of contemporary "literary theory". Exactly what is the relevance of Wilson Knight's now-forty-years-old ideas about "symbolic patterns", "spatial correspondences" and "metaphysical wholeness" in the context of the pared-down system of signs, discourses and self-destructing artefacts that "literature" is now seen to be? Is this not in fact a version of the phenomenological type of lit. crit. which—essentialist, organicist—T. Eagleton tells us roundly is nothing but a "pure distillation of the blind-spots, prejudices, and limitations of modern literary theory as a whole" (T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (1983), p. 60)?

Such weighty matters cannot be given justice here, although this reviewer would regard Wilson Knight's work as important, even if at times eccentric. Professor Van Domelen's book, however, steers erratically through the eccentricities, occasionally adding to them, and in spite of all, does show Wilson Knight to have been a man of remarkable integrity, imaginative perception, and a meticulous worker in the service of his own philosophy of literature. There is a lengthy discussion of Knight's relationship to the Coleridgean *esemplastic* (or creative) vision, and of the part bisexuality and homosexuality play in the interpretation of Byron and Powys. Near the end of the book, Van Domelen examines Wilson Knight's espousal of spiritualism, and its (apparently) detri-

mental effect on his later criticism. Of particular interest is a transcription of the conversation with the medium, Miss Horsfield, at Exeter on 14 July 1963, in which the spirit of John Cowper was present beside Wilson Knight in the room.

The final two chapters crystallize the salient problems I have described in Van Domelen's book. Whilst trying to be fair to the contradictory nature of Knight's personality and to the contradictory reactions to him among contemporaries and critics, the author fails to state whether Wilson Knight was an original thinker or not, and whether he has had any significant influence on the development of literary critical understanding in the last three decades (p. 113). Most irritating of all, we are treated to further variations on his name. Not content with rocking between "Knight", "Wilson Knight" and "Wilson" (cf. "Jackson Knight", "Jackson" and "Jack"), Knight is now called "Richard" and "Dick". One or perhaps two names throughout would have helped to clean up a messy text.

PETER J. FOSS

*Wales: The Imagined Nation. Essays in Cultural and National Identity*,  
Edited by TONY CURTIS.

Poetry Wales Press, 1986, £5.95 (paperback).

Imagining Wales has become something of a cottage industry, or ivory tower industry depending on your point of view, in recent years. In the years leading up to the devolution referendum of 1979 the theme was the awakening of nationhood, the emergence of self-confidence, the assertion of individuality, epitomized by the first series of *Planet* and the ambitious journal *Arcade*. Recently, a more sombre and reflective mood has predominated; in televised interpretations of history and in a refurbished *Planet*, questions have been raised about the very existence of a nation and people in Wales. Not simply "Who were the Welsh?" but, indeed, "Were there any Welsh?" In this striking new collection of essays these questions are taken a good deal further, above all by locating the role of myth-making in the literature and art of Wales, and by implication, its politics. In a challenging, savage and far-reaching analysis of public perceptions of R. S. Thomas's poetry, for example, Tony

Bianchi identifies some of the processes by which an English-speaking intelligentsia in Wales has simultaneously been engaged in and excluded from a discourse about Welsh identity; in the process, this majority portion of the Welsh people have been culturally emasculated and subordinated. This memorable essay is, moreover, one of the most perceptive critical studies to have been written about Thomas's poetry.

Other essays pursue some of these themes, though through different media and agencies. Prys Morgan, whose recent work on Welsh traditions and historiography has been so widely praised, writes about the transmission of an idealized and imagined Welshness through social and cultural rituals and concludes that it was only by such processes that Welsh identity of any kind was sustained. Dai Smith explores the routes by which industrial novelists of the 1930s sought to confront the disappearance of "traditional" Wales. Most of the essays, however, catalogue the failure of art, theatre, television or cinema to strike an original or distinct note; Peter Stead, for example, shows how the acceptance by British producers of American styles and methods of film-making and of American pre-occupations, has prevented the emergence of either British or, more specifically, Welsh film genres. On a different note, Deirdre Beddoe analyses the inadequate treatment of women in history or literature, a theme she has explored in a number of notable works in recent years.

One familiar weakness of collections of essays is the crude juxtaposition of individual essays, written independently of each other and, often, in ignorance of each other's arguments. Whether by accident or design, this collection is more harmonious than most; perhaps there is, after all, a consensus emerging over the hiatuses in Welsh identity. Nevertheless, some of the essays do sit uncomfortably with each other, with perspectives which not so much differ as diverge: for example, John Hartley and Trevor Wright's interesting analysis of the media treatment of *Plaid Cymru*, which is stylistically and methodologically different from most of the other essays in the book and opens up quite different issues. Despite this, the book works quite well as a whole, with at least one outstanding essay, by Tony Bianchi. If Wales, according to this view, is imagined, the debate over these essays will be real enough.

DEIAN HOPKIN

*Tide-race*,  
BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN.

Seren Books, 1987, £3.95 (paperback).

Twenty-five years ago Brenda Chamberlain seemed firmly established as one of our foremost native Welsh artists and writers. After her sudden and untimely death in 1971, however, her work seemed to sink gradually into obscurity, and although she had never considered herself as a "Welsh" or "local" artist, over the years she has tended to become marginalized in that way. Perhaps it is not entirely fortuitous that whilst Anglo-Welsh writer-artists like David Jones have enjoyed a constant vogue, women like Brenda Chamberlain and Margiad Evans, who also excelled in the two media, have suffered comparative neglect. Fortunately, interest in Brenda Chamberlain is reviving, and it is to be hoped that this re-issue of *Tide-race* will bring her work to a wider audience. For too long it has been out of print and obtainable only through diligent research in second-hand book shops.

Brenda Chamberlain was born and brought up in Bangor, Caernarfonshire, and returned to live in that area after training at the Royal Academy of Art in London. Although she began her career as an artist, she began to emerge as a writer of some distinction as well, publishing her first book, *The Green Heart*, a collection of poems, in 1958. *Tide-race*, first published in 1962 was her second volume. Like *The Water Castle* (1964) and *A Rope of Vines* (1965), *Tide-race* is essentially autobiographical, albeit thinly veiled with fictional names.

*Tide-race* is the fruit of the years she spent living on Bardsey Island, off the westernmost tip of Caernarfonshire, from 1947 onwards. This is no ordinary journal, however, but a unique combination of prose, poetry and art. The prose provides the main framework, but frequently moves almost imperceptibly into prose-poetry, or gives way to individual poems, the passage to and fro from one medium or register to another being accomplished naturally, without self-consciousness. This is not to suggest that there is no narrative as such. On the contrary, we find a clear exposition of events leading to Chamberlain's decision to move to Bardsey, of her first experiences when she arrived there as a not entirely welcome stranger, and an account not only of her changing relations with her neighbours but also of the effects—both on the individual and on the inhabitants as a group—of

living on a windswept, often inaccessible island. As a counterpoint to the narrative of events and people's reactions to them runs her evocation of her own evolving relationship with the island and the sea that surrounds it, often conveyed in terms of a personal yet universally comprehensible mythology.

Perhaps *Tide-race* could best be described as a poetic distillation of Brenda Chamberlain's experience of living on Bardsey. However, such a definition fails to take into account the second, equally important dimension to her work: the visual element. Here as in *The Water Castle* and *A Rope of Vines* she has provided her own illustrations to the text, although whereas in those later works line drawings alone were included, in *Tide-race* full colour plates of paintings as well appeared in the first edition. The author's illustrations always form an integral part of the book, not simply providing a concrete visual depiction of what the words imply, but complementing the text thematically and even interacting with it. Thus the illustrations help to create the particular ambiance, or to convey mood, revealing further levels of meaning in the text, whilst the words on the page provide a context and a commentary on the picture, suggesting a specific, sometimes symbolic interpretation.

For this reason it is a bitter disappointment that the publishers decided to jettison the four full colour plates of the first edition, and have done so without any note of explanation. Doubtless this was for financial reasons, but it would have been preferable to increase the very reasonable cover price than to take this course. One of the original plates, admittedly, is reproduced on the front cover, but the right hand margin has been over-trimmed so that part of the painting has been lost. This is bad enough, but the use of "Seascape in Red" on the cover has meant abandoning the far superior "Eye of the Sea" which was used on the original dust-jacket, designed as a whole by Brenda Chamberlain herself. The black, green and white of the 1962 cover not only conveyed far more of the feel of the book as a whole but was certainly far more pleasing to the eye than the gaudy red and blue of the reprint. Moreover, reduction in the size of the page margins without any corresponding reduction in the print size has unbalanced the relationship between page, text and illustrations.

With *Tide-race*, perhaps more than with any other of Brenda Chamberlain's work, there is a danger of it being dismissed as "regional". It is

still unfortunately true that literature evoking the experiences of people living in "remote" Welsh communities is likely to be, at best, considered of marginal, specialized interest, all the more so if written by women, whilst at the same time writing about middle-class people living in London is too often regarded as being, by definition, of "universal" interest. Nonetheless, *Tide-race* has undoubtedly a universal quality; it is not simply a book about a particular person living on a particular Welsh island at a particular time. A comparison with *A Rope of Vines*, Brenda Chamberlain's account of her life on a Greek island, confirms this point. Although both comprise narratives of their author's personal experiences, many of those experiences are universal. The emotions are human and familiar, often exposed with painful honesty, relations between the narrator and her friends and neighbours, or between third parties, are subjected to subtle analysis, as is the relationship between the human being and physical environment.

*Tide-race* and its author deserve to be more widely known, and Seren Books are to be warmly congratulated on their decision to reprint. But in view of the fact that many of today's readers may be new to Brenda Chamberlain's work, it is a pity that Jonah Jones's elegantly written afterword should be impressionistic rather than informative, and reveal more about Jonah Jones than Brenda Chamberlain. And it is scandalous that any Welsh publishing house, in receipt of grant aid from the Welsh Arts Council, should send books like this to be printed in the south of England.

CERIDWEN LLOYD-MORGAN

*The Poetry of R. S. Thomas*,  
J. P. WARD.

Poetry Wales Press, 1987, £9.95.

Even without R. S. Thomas's remark in 1981, "I can't meditate—I start writing poems if I try to meditate", the ruminative, contemplative shape of his work has been clear from the beginning. His poetic quest has been characterized by a rigorous training of focus. The imperatives to "See", "Study", "Consider" which open many of his earlier poems concentrate their attention on the figures rooted in the landscape, those who "affront, bewilder yet compel my gaze". Later

imperatives still urge to “wear your eyes out”, but the focus here is what he calls “God-space”. Learning to wait; waiting in order to learn: these are the hallmarks of the poetry.

It is the strength of J. P. Ward’s study that he identifies this stance at the outset: “this poet finds that he, as individual and as poet, is a watcher; that he must watch, that this is the mode of his poetry and that this will not be changed” (p. 21). This recognition imposes special demands on the critic, however, who must watch with him. The refreshing thing about this volume is its willingness to do just that—to follow nuance and cadence and to trace sequences of image and attitude. This gives the book a certain circularity; here Ward has successfully harmonized methodology with subject matter, and his patient attention actually shows how to *read* the poems. Unlike other recent studies, the poetry is not here subservient to some wider dogma of the critic’s own.

The study is divided into four main sections, beginning with *Song at the Year’s Turning* (1955) and ending with *Ingrowing Thoughts* (1985). A postscript discusses “less central” and most recent writing. Ward groups three collections within each section, marking what he identifies as particular phases of development, each characterized by shifting focus: on Welsh landscape and people; on the observing self in its effort to find orientation amidst mundanity and questioning; in “a clear new start with *H’m*” on different versions of the Christian myth, the confrontation of technological and spiritual worlds; and latterly the “looking, even . . . staring poet” finds a focus in objects made to be deliberately looked at—in paintings. There is of course some overlap between sections, but the focus is studiously on the poetry and the perspective is that of a fellow poet. Most usefully of all Ward traces across these periods R. S. Thomas’s “real source and central need” as a poet, his metaphoric power, where his real achievement is said to lie. On individual poems his study is rich and provocative in insight.

It is when Ward moves from the particular to the general that he is perhaps less convincing, most especially in his account of the wider cognitive function of metaphor. His description of the status of metaphor is far from clear (pp. 43-47) and imperfectly harmonized into the context in which it occurs, not least because it does not adequately account for the special role of metaphor in religious language. This is a subject which has been examined most penetratingly

recently in Janet Martin Soskice’s *Metaphor and Religious Language* (1985), and with implications for our study of R. S. Thomas by T. R. Wright in his *Theology and Literature* (1988). It is surely unremarkable to say that “language can never refer to an objective world without subjective intervention or bias” (45) if by using this phrase one thing we acknowledge is the inability of religious language to directly name clearly discernible objects. But what function is metaphor to have for the religious poet? Ward offers the suggestion that language “is the way we attempt to convey our idea of reality to each other, to get across to each other. If this is true, then metaphor fills space in order to gain various kinds of attention” (45). But it remains unclear what we are in fact saying in accepting that metaphor *fills space*. To follow Ricoeur and Sally McFague in speaking of metaphors as also “literally untrue” is an unnecessary distraction; and if we follow Soskice in her analysis it is further to impose a limitation on our capacity to respond adequately to them and, through this notion of split reference, to reduce metaphor to a matter of comparison (which Ward eschews). The question for the religious poet is whether “filling space” is genuinely catachretical—does it genuinely *disclose*, bridge a “lexical gap”? Ward asks appropriately, “Are [his metaphors] simply a poetic gift, or are they something to do with Thomas’s priestly vocation as well?” (43). But this is not a question which is adequately answered.

To take an example. Ward’s discussion of “In a Country Church” is a good illustration of his writing at his best when concentrated on individual poems. He notes the remarkable nature of the opening, for one who has access to the verbal traditions of both poet and priest: “To one kneeling down no word came”. The poem generates its own answer to the question, “Was he balked by silence?”,

He kneeled long,  
And saw love in a dark crown  
Of thorns blazing, and a winter tree  
Golden with fruit of a man’s body.

The marvellously rich metaphoric power here means, Ward points out, that he is not balked: verbal incapacity is matched with extraordinary creative capacity. Ward comments: “What survives in an otherwise hopeless position is an extraordinary figurative power, perhaps just because other ways are closed. It must have left

Thomas in huge dilemmas, if his calling demanded a more social, active response to the conditions his parishioners had to wrestle with for their lifetimes" (35). The tension here is not, surely, that of the priest resorting to metaphor as the last resource in a desperate situation; the paradox comes in "naming that which has no name", not in order to fill space, but precisely to *reveal* in a way that is cognitively unique—not so much as last resort as theological necessity. And this task is intimately bound up with his priesthood. How else does one make sense of R. S. Thomas's claim that, "The poet invents the metaphor, and the Christian lives it"?

A not unrelated unease can be felt with an occasionally simplistic division between "Protestant" and "Catholic" and with the rigorous equation of R. S. Thomas with the former. One result of this is to neglect the conflict arising from R. S. Thomas's responsibility to a worshipping community and to examine the conflicts that occur in the poetry within the context of that community. If these sections weaken the cohesiveness of the study they do not in fact form its greatest substance. Where Ward writes most memorably and valuably is in tracing R. S. Thomas's articulation of absence in Chapter 3, "a state whose very nature must somehow hint at meaningfulness".

There is a useful index to the poems discussed, preceded by a much less useful list of "Selected Related Reading". We are told that Ward has reached "certain views" about the influence of the writers listed, and that he has "a growing feeling about them", neither observation being especially helpful to the reader. In the end, however, all readers of R. S. Thomas will be grateful to J. P. Ward for his engaging and illuminating study, one that repays reading and re-reading. His epigraph from Nietzsche is a fitting tribute to his subject: "I love the great despisers because they are also the great adorers, arrows of longing for the further shore".

SIMON BARKER

*Reform and Intellectual Debate in Victorian England,*

Edited by BARBARA DENNIS and DAVID SKILTON.

Croom Helm, 1987, £27.50 (hardback), £8.95 (paperback).

I read this selection of texts yesterday and rose this morn a sadder and a wiser man. Well, "wiser"

over-states my intellectual improvement: I am helpfully better-informed about Victorian matters that concern me. I'm sad because, having taken early retirement, I've no students to recommend it to and discuss it with; a little sad too because, useful though the compilation is, it could, I think, have been better.

Extracts, mostly quite lengthy, are grouped under seven headings (though, as the workmanlike introduction points out, they often interrelate): Politics and Administration, The Gentleman, The Religious Debate, The Scientific Approach, The "Woman Question", Education, and Leisure and the Arts. Most of the items are taken from periodicals. Only discursive prose is used: novels and poems which contributed to these "debates" are not drawn upon. The editors "have deliberately avoided, on the whole, the big names readily available elsewhere to which students are presumably directed in other contexts", so there is nothing from Carlyle, Mill, Ruskin, Darwin, Huxley; the intellectual peaks here are R. H. Hutton, and the Stephen brothers, Leslie being ambivalent about Eton and Fitzjames speculating about the science of history and enjoying some French-bashing. The choice of extracts is generally enterprising, though it underrepresents such robustly daft Victorian pronouncements as Fitzjames Stephen's "We should not be asked to believe that every crotchet which tickled the insane vanity of a conceited Frenchman has an eternal and self-evident truth". (I treasure W. L. Burns's observation that "Over and over again, in examining mid-Victorian England, one comes across modes of thought and action so bizarre, so little credible, that the man and woman who practised them appear as the inhabitants, not just of another century but of another world.")

The title says "Victorian", while the introduction speaks of "the years between 1830 and 1880"; in fact, over three-quarters of the items come from the years 1859-81 and none from later. A case could be made for this concentration, in a textbook of modest length, but none is offered. And the "Debate" of the title is somewhat muted. All nine items in "The Religious Debate" are by believers, though several are about unbelief and atheism, and only one of the "Woman Question" items is reactionary on this issue, and that is an intellectually flippant paper by F. O. Morris. (Who he?—the headnote does not identify him, and not all readers will have the *DNB* beside them.) More impressive names and arguments should have been produced on the un-

fashionable side of this debate, such as the famous—notorious?—“Appeal against Female Suffrage” signed by Mrs. Humphry Ward, Beatrice Webb and scores of other distinguished women (or women with distinguished and liberal-minded husbands). Annotation as well as headnotes is sometimes too brief. Thus the note about the Contagious Diseases Act (p. 164n) omits their dates and the fact that they applied to only eleven—later eighteen—garrison towns.

These criticisms aside, I enjoyed and learned from this collection, and so will other readers who know less—or indeed more—about the period than I do. Its mode of procedure may be illustrated by a summary of its opening section, “Politics and Administration”: thirty pages, with a two-page introduction preceding the nine items. David Masson surveys the international and domestic scene in 1859, a Scottish professor argues against the extension of the franchise (“I am set against any further importation of American ideas into this country”), and J. S. Mill’s opposition to the ballot is argued against. A lawyer notes the extent, still, of electoral corruption (“From an address delivered at Lewisham, 1881”—the editors do not always make it easy for the curious reader to look up the sources of these extracts). Sir Charles Trevelyan, in 1875, rejoices in the improvements in the civil service since his and Sir Stafford Northcote’s famous report. J. Llewellyn Davies—not here identified as a Christian Socialist—explains why “all decent poor people should shrink from the workhouse”. The section ends with two items on imperial and colonial policy. Other political issues are raised in the Education and “Woman Question” sections, and others again in this volume’s companion in the Croom Helm World and Work series, Kate Flint’s *The Victorian Novelist: Social Problems and Social Change*.

PHILIP COLLINS

*Wallace Stevens’ Supreme Fiction: A New Romanticism*,  
JOSEPH CARROLL.

Louisiana State University Press, 1987, \$37.50.

When French thought conquered many of the American academies, Wallace Stevens’s texts quickly became the battleground for critical controversy: once Hillis Miller had published his innovative “French” reading of “The Rock”,

an entire new generation of young critics felt free to revise the orthodox reading of Stevens. At its best, such provocative “misreading” illuminates crucial poetic slidings in the complex texts; at its worst, the programmatic application of “deconstructionist” formulas results in massive violations of critical judgement and literary probability. As vulgar “deconstructionists” turned the supple traditions of Continental thought into a handful of literary-critical slogans (“there is nothing outside the text”, “meaning is always deferred”, “texts never escape the play of tropes”), the multiple equivocations of Stevens’s writing could be used at random to illustrate the fashionable conundrum of the day. This crisis was deepened rather than alleviated by the fact that numerous orthodox “defenders” of a “humanist” reading were inadequately equipped for the job: their lack of metaphysical training made them vulnerable to deconstructionist “cleverness”, and the shallowness of their “humanist” assertions left humanism to the dogs. It appears that this unfortunate polarization of mechanical opposites is about to be dissolved, for the scenario of Stevens criticism is currently entering a phase where independent critics are prepared to eschew the ideological deadlock without evading the theoretical issues that energize it.

Carroll’s critical enterprise falls healthily inside this new movement. He is more mature than the “humanists” who are caught in a banal realist/idealist conception of poetic tensions, and he is also more mature than several vulgar “deconstructionists” who use reductive versions of metaphysical insight in order to turn Stevens’s poetry into an ironic exercise in linguistic indefinition. Just as we escape from tiresome dualism (the “dialectic” of reality and imagination), so we also escape from the misery of floundering about in the futility of never-ending “tropes”.

Carroll rather elegantly evades the obvious traps of anti-deconstruction (smug moralism, rigid conservatism, supercilious “tolerance”) by directing our attention to the central issues that deconstructionism has *not* investigated. This is the most encouraging aspect of Carroll’s enterprise, his willingness to affirm what ideologists on both sides have cunningly omitted from their critiques: the centremost power of the visionary dimension of Stevens’s achievement. Bonnie Costello and others have called attention to the importance of visual epiphany in Stevens, but no one seems to have dared to centre the

entire critical enterprise on the poet's peculiarly neo-Romantic quest for a visionary absolute.

The word "visionary" is central for Carroll: he speaks of "visionary drive" (130), "visionary passion" (292), "visionary culmination" (279), "visionary realization" (214), "visionary purpose" (214), "visionary enterprise" (213, 300)—indeed of "visionary poems" (211). But if Wallace Stevens constantly desired visionary fulfillment, that quest should not be naively and reductively rationalized as an identification with "the Romantic". The poet explicitly acknowledged the need for a "new romanticism"—and the emphasis here is perhaps on "new" rather than "romanticism". It was not a question of reanimating something old, "romanticism"; it was a question of finding something in a modern age that would do for the spirit of man what "romanticism" had done in a premodern age for that spirit. Discontinuity is as crucial as continuity. Stevens cannot be seen as an "extension" of romanticism, for as Carroll points out the poet's mature writing *begins* in a phase where the Romantic is felt to be utterly exhausted (5).

Carroll argues that Stevens is "the most important philosophical poet of the twentieth century" (11). This somewhat alarming statement grows at once more and less alarming once we begin to realize that Carroll is going to restrict most philosophical references to Emerson, James, and Santayana. This lack of solid metaphysical intertextuality becomes no less poignant in the light of the almost total lack of references to the great Stevens scholars (philosophical as well as nonphilosophical or anti-philosophical). If a critic has had something relevant to say, the footnote referring to him or her will show obvious signs of having been pasted on to the main text as a supplement and belated "extra". This carelessness together with the facile assumption that Stevens' private remarks regularly offer vital clues of interpretation, is perhaps the major flaw of the critical venture.

Yet Carroll's circumnavigation of the entire critico-metaphysical shebang is not altogether a mark of unwisdom. By evading a too-analytical and too-smart "close reading" of the *logic* of Stevens's writing, Carroll facilitates an engagement with more dynamic aspects of the poet's enormous intellectual thrust. The areas of (vaguely philosophical) insight that deconstructionists uncover are seldom the primary agents of philosophical suggestion in Stevens. In fact the art of merely "reasoning" about Stevens, the bad habit of just picking him to pieces with the

purely analytical faculties of the mind, conceals precisely those regions of deep thinking that qualify the poet as a major thinker of our times. Carroll touches this strange fact at the end of his excellent introduction, when he observes that Stevens's conceptual paradigms are "modes of being" rather than mere "hypotheses": the poet "responds to them, at any given moment, with the kind of immediacy with which he responds to the weather" (12). This situation evokes a truth that most of us secretly recognize but that few of us actually acknowledge in public discourse: that cosmic and metaphysical paradigms (or individually distinct philosophical propositions) vary in their closeness to us from day to day, moment to moment. In the course of a single day's fluctuating meditations, we can be monist, pluralist, atheist, idealist, materialist, empiricist, romanticist, realist, and transcendentalist. The fact that our ego may be thoroughly committed to *one* of these alternatives does not in itself change much: we still, if we are free, have the ability to roam over the entire spectrum.

Such fluctuation, conspicuous in Stevens's long metaphysical poems, may seem at first to promote the sense of pluralism at the expense of monism: one moves through *many* phases and "truths". Yet this rationalization is perhaps radically premature. That, indeed, is *one* of the lessons to be learned from the experience of living through a poem like "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" or "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven": precisely because the various options in the final analysis cancel one another out, *as modes of being*, the individual differences between them become strangely arbitrary, almost unreal. What becomes important is not the factual existence (in thought, logic) of these distinct alternatives but instead the sustained, quasi-permanent sense of the unifying mind that is allowing them to revolve and alternate. It is from this recognition of an abiding poetic "Mind" that the poet's central notions can be derived: "central mind", "supreme fiction", "hero", "major man", and so forth. As the reader learns to recognize the unique elegance of a thinking that returns to poise with the same breathtaking grace, canto after canto, there is gradually created the feeling that the consistently mystical centrality of the poetic organization is the manifestation of the organic breath of the spirit. This spirit need not be that of the poet "himself"; nor need this spirit *not* be that entity.

Compositional mastery is at once personal and impersonal, factual and transcendental.

Illusion and reality, polar opposites in Stevens's early writing, become reversible into their mutual negations at the level of (the) "supreme fiction", for that fiction is by now "a construct that invests illusion with ontological validity" (267). This ability of Stevens to affirm the fictional as the real, in other words to affirm affirmation, runs contrary to the pessimism of many American critics who think they are "deconstructing" him. In importing deconstruction from Paris, it was precisely the affirmative, nonpessimistic dimension that they failed to recognize and preserve: hence the abyss of tonal difference between the bleached landscapes of "deconstructive" rationalization and the imaginatively bright territories of Stevens's visionary fictions.

The "nothingness" that Stevens tends to affirm (from "The Snow Man" onwards) is easily confused with the "pessimistic" nothingness that analytical scepticism arrives at. But Stevens, far from being an "unhappy consciousness", or morbid nihilist, was one who could recognize emptiness as a source of inspiration and affirmation. This is the very point that vulgar deconstructionists of the pessimistic kind miss. As Carroll observes in his admirable discussion of "Chocorua" and the "negative sublime" (206), Stevens can affirm an epiphany without central substance; in this way "central emptiness" does not necessarily suggest an emptying but instead a process that is so pure and absolute that substance becomes negative: transparent, invisible, "fictional", supreme. The poetic centre becomes "ontologically tenuous" (206), negotiating the absolute exchange between fulfilment and emptiness without withdrawing the affirmative impulse from either of the two.

It is the affirmative, almost vitalistic quality in Stevens that causes Carroll to place him closer in temperament to the American transcendentalist than to the sceptical Continental aesthete (261). It could be objected, however, that Carroll is a bit one-sided in his appraisal—particularly so when he wants us to believe that Stevens yearned for "divinity" as part of his "religious vision" (289). In addition, it is difficult to reconcile Stevens's alleged commitment to "the Romantic view of language" (287) and its faith in immanence and organic self-generation with the fact that the poet constantly seems to be aware of the paradox produced by the aesthetic ideal of immediacy (286).

Carroll tries to solve such contradiction by

positing a dualism in Stevens's writing: on the one hand he writes "normal poetry" (full of dualistic tension), on the other hand he writes "pure poetry" (in which there is an *a priori* interfusion of opposites, in quasi-transcendental fashion) (19); Stevens strives *either* towards a poetry of the senses *or else* towards visionary exaltation in "high poetry" of the mature type (124). This kind of rationalization of Stevens's poetry is open to the criticism that things are not so easily compartmentalized in these texts, and that the interpretative scheme only adds a new mechanical opposition ("normal" versus "pure" poetry) to the body of texts it is already pretending to want to save from dualistic schematization.

This critical move is particularly unfortunate in view of the fact that Carroll's most promising achievement is his effort to contradistinguish two types of dichotomies in Stevens (277)—dualisms that Stevens may be confusing with one another (282). If Stevens is really working with two main sets of oppositions, yet rationalizing these two sets as a single binary opposition in his capacity as thinker (rather than poet), then the *text's* tendency to hit back at the mechanical simplification with a vengeance suggests the manner in which deeper parts of a poetic problematic are always erupting into the surface logic of discourse: subterranean matter looking for an outlet. *That* kind of contradiction, quite different from the paradoxes that maroons some deconstructionists in meaninglessness, deserves more attention. As Carroll is already beginning to see, the fine discrimination of opposed kinds of opposites, rather than leaving us in the homogeneous "nothingness" of critical pessimism, places us in view of a distinction between one type of nothingness and another (180). In the context of such a mode of poetic apprehension, the "visionary" nothingness that propels Stevens's general quest for illumination and mystical integration can be grasped as a state of poetic purity rather than as a blank or simple absence.

It is when the segregative potential of criticism is in this way pushed from the level of mere "analysis" towards the horizon of poetic desire as such that the literary experience, recently valued as little more than an exercise in futility, can once again be recognized as an adventure for the spirit. Although Carroll is not always successful and precise in his loose paraphrase, and although he develops nothing remotely reminiscent of a scientific theory to explain how

the "magnification" of sensory particulars (121) produces the marriage of the commonplace and the miraculous (284), his willingness to discuss Stevens against a background of visionary

affirmation suggests that criticism of the transcendentalist kind has a life of its own.

H. W. FAWKNER



*The Quest for Olwen*,  
GWYN THOMAS and KEVIN CROSSLEY-  
HOLLAND.

Illustrated by MARGARET JONES.

Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1988, £8.95.

This volume is a companion to the 1984 *Tales from the Mabinogion*, and for each Gwyn Thomas was commissioned by the Welsh Arts Council to provide a new Welsh text and Margaret Jones the illustrations. What we have here is an English language rendering with the help of Kevin Crossley-Holland of Gwyn Thomas's text of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, with the original illustrations. *The Quest for Olwen* is produced to a high standard and well conceived, and should win many new readers for the ancient Welsh tales. Although it may seem to be aimed at the children's audience, and indeed it has so far been noticed mainly in that context, it is appealing on a number of levels, and for many adult readers will provide a first access into a complex body of literature.

One of the most outstanding features of the volume is the work of Margaret Jones who is an accomplished illustrator with a keen sense of how to use visual material in relation to narrative. The illustrations are of five kinds: decorative borders, black and white framed illustrations, marginal or border illustrations which run across the upper parts of two pages in a frieze effect, unframed line drawings of incidental features of the narrative, and full-page, in one case double-page, colour illustrations. The richness and variety of the illustrations are stunning, and all the more so for the way they are integrated with and comment on the text.

The style of the illustrations varies but in the main they draw on the roots of Hiberno-Saxon art which itself was an uneasy and variable mixture of Celtic abstract patterns, Germanic zoomorphic designs and mediterranean naturalism. This mixture of elements is at the basis of Margaret Jones's work, but she has not been content with mere imitation, and has developed and adapted certain features of the style for her own purposes. The title page includes borders of interlace and zoomorphic designs and a border of naturalistic clover leaves and flowers, an allusion to Olwen, 'white footprint' ('wherever she walked four white clovers grew in the print of her foot' (p.23)). The tradition of the zoomorphic designs was to make the animal heads and bodies stylized and abstract, their energy deriving from the patterns and designs themselves. But Margaret Jones has also used this tradition in a roundel to present in more naturalistic terms a representation of Wildboar and his family, an allusion to a crucial episode late in the narrative. This blend of formalism and naturalism establishes a link with the naturalistic representation of Culhwch and Olwen in the knot in the top left section of the title page.

The styles and traditions announced on the title page are taken up in various ways in the illustrations to the narrative. For the expansive frieze-like representation of the company of knights about to depart on the quest, Margaret Jones has developed a border at the top of the illustration which literally grows out of the tree in the foreground, and the topmost branches are woven into a regular pattern with zoomorphic designs producing an inhabited vine-scroll, another Hiberno-Saxon device. As with many

medieval texts accounts of setting and character are sparse except where rhetorical traditions demand. The introduction of Culhwch as he starts out on his journey to Arthur's court derives from the rhetorical tradition of the *descriptio* with details carefully enumerated (p. 8). Here the text cries out for illustration, but the illustration cannot do justice to the text whose vivid similes operate in a dimension of myth and absolute value. But with the introduction of Olwen (p. 23) the *descriptio* can be rendered more successfully in visual terms because here the images which are used to provide its absolutes are drawn from the natural world (e.g. 'her eyes were more beautiful than the eyes of a young hawk'). The terms are different but one is reminded of the *descriptio* of Alison in Chaucer's 'Miller's Tale'.

The most elaborate colour illustration, spread over two pages (pp. 42-3), shows Cai and Bedwyr riding on the back of the Salmon of the Blue Lake to Gloucester to rescue Mabon. The episode is the climax of one of the tasks set for winning Olwen. This expansive and dramatic representation reflects an important feature of this part of the narrative, the release of tension

which has been built up through the formula of the prolonged interrogation of the ancient beasts. The design of the illustration further reflects the narrative structure through a small border on the left which shows the beasts as they are each questioned. The device is that of the illustrators of medieval manuscripts who used the margins to develop narratives to which the climax is presented in the main miniature, for example the events of the early life of the Virgin leading up to a depiction of the Annunciation.

Margaret Jones is an intelligent and perceptive illustrator with an excellent sense of the verbal and visual traditions in which she is working, but she develops her work in independent directions and has made a style of her own.

The English text is very readable. There are some discreet footnotes on the etymology and pronunciation of Welsh names; the volume would have benefited from a more extensive glossary as was provided for the *The Tales from the Maginogion*. Altogether this is a successful and welcome volume; we can only look forward with anticipation to more from the same team.

· C. W. MARX



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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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JOHN ACKERMAN's poetry includes *The Image and the Dark* (Gomer, 1975). His work on Dylan Thomas includes *Dylan Thomas: Life and Work* (OUP, 1964) and *Welsh Dylan* (John Jones, 1979).

SIMON BARKER has contributed to *Poetry Wales*. He teaches at the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne, and is currently researching R. S. Thomas.

BRUCE M. BROWN, now retired, was the Director of the Colgate University Library from 1959 to 1980 and from 1980 to 1985 the Head of Special Collections and University Archives.

PHILIP COLLINS was formerly Professor of English at the University of Leicester. His best known works include *Dickens and Crime* and *Dickens and Education* (Macmillan, 1962, 1963).

DON DALE-JONES, former Senior Lecturer, Trinity College, Carmarthen, includes among his publications, *Emlyn Williams* (Writers of Wales Series, UWP, 1979) and the co-edition of *The Collected Poems of T. Harri Jones* (1977, repr. Gomer, 1987).

H. W. FAWKNER is a Reader at the University of Göteborg, Sweden. His major publications are *Animation and Reification in Dickens's Vision of the Life-Denying Society* (Stockholm, 1977), *The Timescapes of John Fowles* and *The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys* (Associated University Presses, 1984, 1986). He will shortly be visiting SDUC, Lampeter as an exchange lecturer.

PETER J. FOSS is Assistant Editor of *The New Welsh Review*. He has taught at the University of Venice and recently completed the first Ph.D. dissertation on Llewelyn Powys (SDUC, University of Wales, 1987). He has been a co-editor of *Other Poetry* and is author of *Poems for Peckleton* (1980), *The History of Market Bosworth* (1984) and a forthcoming study of the Battle of Bosworth.

DEIAN HOPKIN is Senior Lecturer in Modern History at University College, Aberystwyth. He was a founding editor of *Llafur: The Journal for the Study*

of *Welsh Labour History*, and is co-founder of the International Association for History and Computing.

W. J. KEITH is Professor of English at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (1980), *Canadian Literature in English* (1975) and *Regions of the Imagination* (University of Toronto Press, 1988).

CERIDWEN LLOYD-MORGAN is an archivist attached to the Department of Manuscripts at the National Library of Wales. Her research interests lie principally in the areas of Welsh literature and women's literature. Her work has appeared in such journals as *Medium Aevum*, *Planet*, *Burlington Magazine*, *Llên Cymru*, *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, *Y Faner* and *Llais Llyfrau*. An article on Gwen John will shortly appear in the *National Library of Wales Journal*. She is currently writing a book on Arthurian literature in Wales from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Elis Gruffudd.

C. W. MARX lectures in English at SDUC, Lampeter. His publications include the articles "The . . . Doctrine of the Redemption in the Middle English Mystery Plays" (*Medium Aevum*, 1985) and ". . . Narrative Linking in Five Manuscripts of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century" (*Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth Century England*, ed. D. Pearsall, Cambridge, 1983). He edited *The Middle English Prose Complaint of Our Lady and Gospel of Nicodemus* (Heidelberg, 1987).

PENNY SMITH is the Trefloyne Fellow, UCW, Aberystwyth, engaged in postdoctoral research on John Cowper Powys, the subject of her Ph.D thesis at Oxford and earlier publication in *The Powys Review*.

DEBORAH WILLS recently completed her M.A. and is engaged in further research at Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, working there at the Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts.

ROBIN L. WOOD lectures in English at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. He completed a Ph.D. thesis on J. C. Powys's Welsh Mythology in 1982 (Aberystwyth, University of Wales).



